The New Criterion

November 2002

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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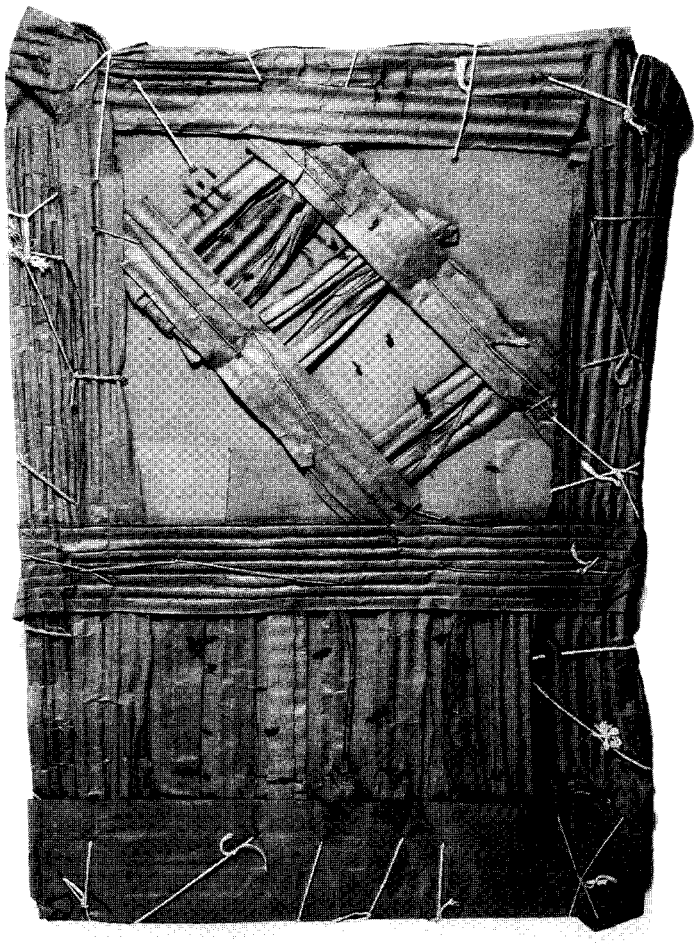

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The New Criterion *November 2002*

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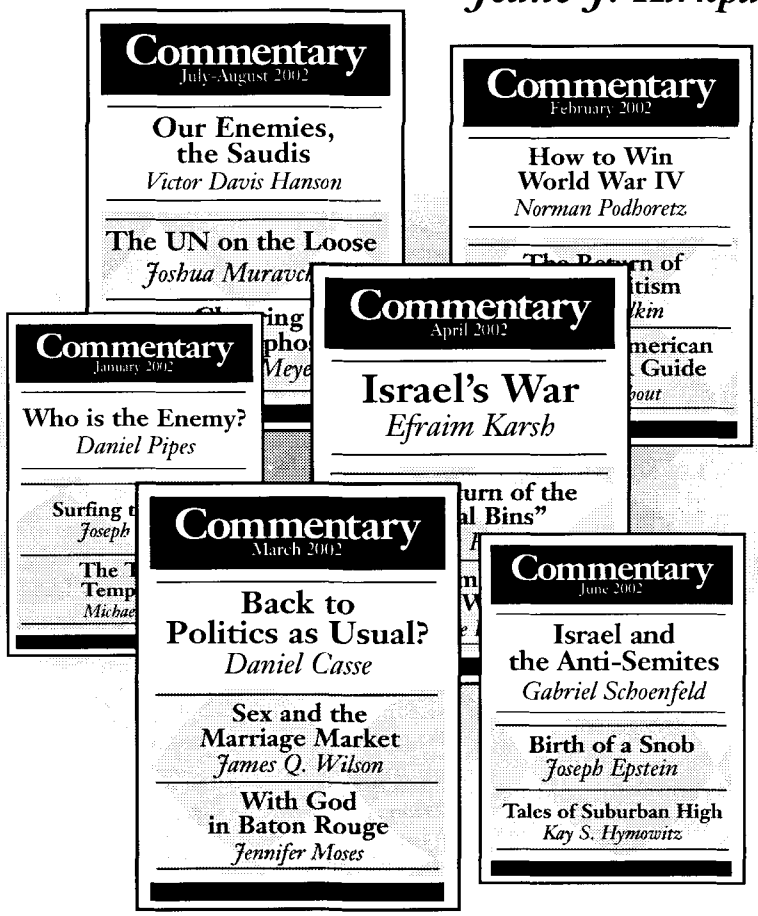
"Very, very important to the life of the United States, to the West, and, I am convinced, to freedom."

—Jeane J. Kirkpatrick



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Notes & Comments: November 2002

Academic freedom for me but not for thee

How quickly time passes! It seems only yesterday that we were reporting in this space on Annie Sprinkle's performance at The Kitchen, the supertrendy performance venue in downtown Manhattan. In fact, it was more than a decade ago, in the winter of 1990, that Miss Sprinkle, the former prostitute and porn star reborn as a "feminist porn activist," came to entertain and enlighten the hip multitudes that congregate at places like The Kitchen. What captured our interest back then was not so much the particulars of this sexual entrepreneur's performance—pornographic exhibitionism masquerading as art had already become a bit of a yawn—but the fact that it was paid for in part by . . . well, by all of us, courtesy of the largess of the National Endowment for the Arts. Back then the NEA was busy handing out cash for all sorts of nasty stuff, the more degrading the better. That policy garnered lots of headlines for the government agency. It also precipitated its eventual marginalization. But in 1990 there was still a *frisson* to be had from taxpayer-funded sponsorship of smut. It was this aspect of the evening that excited Annie Sprinkle (yes, it's a *nom de guerre*: her real name is Ellen Steinberg). At one point, flouncing about almost naked, she invited members of the audience to come up to the stage to photograph her in any pose they liked. "Usually I get a lot of money for this," she explained. "But tonight it's government funded."

How long ago it seems. But Annie Sprinkle has not gone away. She has become part of the women's studies circus act touring college campuses under the banner of feminism and sexual freedom. One recent stop for Miss Sprinkle was at Hamilton College in upstate New York. Like many private liberal arts colleges these days, Hamilton hands parents a bill in excess of $30,000 per year. What do they get for that considerable sum? One thing they get is organizations like the Womyn's Center (note the "y"), which used a few thousand dollars from college coffers to bring Annie Sprinkle to campus. Part of Miss Sprinkle's performance was running a "workshop" on "Super Sex Technology." (The British novelist Kingsley Amis once observed that much of what had gone wrong with the twentieth century could be summed up in the word "workshop": and how!) Writing in the Utica *Observer-Dispatch*, Robert L. Paquette, a professor of history at Hamilton, noted that Miss Sprinkle's workshop involved "educating students and faculty on how better to pleasure themselves." And not only college students. We're told that the audience for that particular educational effort included some local high school students as

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well as members of the Hamilton College community: how's that for town-gown relations?

Professor Paquette, who conjectured that he may be Hamilton's only "out-of-closet conservative" (among a faculty of nearly two hundred), labored hard to get Annie Sprinkle's performance at Hamilton cancelled. He failed, of course. We say "of course" because the college administration, confronted with such a demand, instantly began bleating about the First Amendment and academic freedom. On liberals, those shibboleths act as a potent moral sedative, producing silence, lamb-like acquiescence, and lock-step conformity.

It needn't be that way. As Rochelle Gurstein pointed out in her book *The Repeal of Reticence* (1996), until the 1950s the First Amendment was explicitly excluded by the courts as a defense for trafficking in obscene materials. Are we wiser now? Liberals celebrate the introduction of First Amendment protection for obscenity as a victory for progress and freedom; "it is better understood," Gurstein observed, "as a marker of the disappearance of shared ideas about what constitutes obscenity and what constitutes art."

Something similar might be said about academic freedom. The sociologist Edward Shils summed up the salient point with his customary incisiveness in *The American Scholar* in the mid-1980s. Academic freedom, he noted, is not a universal human right. On the contrary, it is a "qualified right," a "privilege" extended to people fulfilling a certain role in exchange for the performance of certain duties. Essentially, Shils wrote, academic freedom "is the freedom to seek and transmit the truth." It does not, he pointedly added, "extend to the conduct of political propaganda in teaching."

We remind readers of these distinctions partly in order to suggest that invocation of the First Amendment and academic freedom does not purchase a blanket immunity from moral censure. Academic freedom is the precious freedom to pursue the truth; it is not a license to engage in moral subversion. There is no reason that parents, for example, need countenance the corruption of their sons and daughters because some college dean or women's studies professor claims the prerogative of academic freedom.

Still, a favorite strategy of intimidation among those whose goal is moral revolution has been to invoke the protection of the First Amendment and the privilege of academic freedom. It is worth noting, however, that those freedoms are often applied selectively. The basic formula is this: "Academic freedom for me, but not for thee—at least not if you have the temerity to disagree with my politically correct opinions."

Hamilton College provided an instructive illustration of this procedure at work. Robert Paquette attempts to have Miss Sprinkle's performance cancelled but is told that doing so would be a violation of the First Amendment and academic freedom. He then arranges for the college's audio-visual department to tape Miss Sprinkle's performance, having previously obtained her signature on a waiver that, among other things, authorized "unrestricted access" to and copying of the tape. David Paris, the dean of the faculty at Hamilton, learns of the tape and intercepts it. In response to a request from Professor Paquette, Dean Paris responds that he will release the tape, but only if it is agreed that it will not be copied or made publicly available. But why? Doesn't Professor Paquette enjoy the same freedoms that the Womyn's Center and Annie Sprinkle enjoy? Or perhaps Dean Paris believes that Professor Paquette's freedom of expression is less important than theirs?

Well, we are told that the dean finally caved in, doubtless because he feared legal action. But his initial effort to suppress the tape offers a good lesson in how our politically correct academic commissars understand free speech. They regard it as a privilege reserved largely for those who are

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on the right—which means the Left—side of any debate. They do not say this, of course. They merely confiscate your tape if you happen to be on the "unenlightened" side.

David Paris was probably worried that a tape of Annie Sprinkle's sex tips would not be good publicity for Hamilton College. Not an irrational worry, that. But if he was willing to provide a college imprimatur for Annie Sprinkle's performance, why should he object if one of his faculty seeks to make Miss Sprinkle's message more widely known? We suspect that the college's trustees and alumni, to say nothing of parents whose children are being educated at Hamilton, would be most interested in seeing what sort of extracurricular activity the college provides. Probably, parents in the surrounding community would be interested, too, since apparently their high-school-aged children are allowed to participate in such events. We are told that Annie Sprinkle's fee and travel expenses amounted to some $3000. We suggest that the college make an equal sum available to Professor Paquette in order that he might copy and distribute the tape of her performance. That would be a genuinely "cutting-edge" gesture. It would also indicate that Hamilton College was serious about its commitment to free speech.

Rhetorical incontinence

If Annie Sprinkle provides one sort of counter-cultural entertainment, *The New York Times*'s op-ed columnist Maureen Dowd provides another, less sexual but not necessarily less obscene. Dispassionate readers, encountering Dowd's hysterical outbursts, might be forgiven for wondering if she were quite sane. (They might also, we suppose, wonder about the sanity of her employers.) Dowd was already out of control in the Clinton years, when she first came to prominence. But since George W. Bush took office, she has left mere stridency for a form of editorial hectoring that is partly irresponsible, partly surreal. We would not presume to say which of Maureen Dowd's recent effusions is the absolute worst—the competition for that award would be too gruesome to adjudicate. But "The Soufflé Doctrine," published on Sunday, October 20, does represent a new level of rhetorical incontinence. It is one of Dowd's "creative writing" efforts, in which she pretends to be inside the head of her subject—in this case George W. Bush. The opening sentence epitomizes the tone and moral weather of the essay: "The Boy Emperor picked up the morning paper and, stunned, dropped his Juicy Juice box with the little straw attached." "Boy Emperor"? "Juicy juice box"? Dowd obviously gets a little thrill out of referring to the President of the United States as "boy": she does it nine times in the space of a 725-word piece. The aim of her expostulation is to pillory the President as a "befuddled" know-nothing manipulated by his advisors, especially by the eminent defense policy expert Richard Perle. What she succeeds in doing, however, is lampooning herself and casting doubt on the judgment of her editors. It was a fateful day when someone congratulated Maureen Dowd on her cutesie, baby-talk style of political satire. Poor thing, she believed it. And she has been embarked on a campaign to outdo herself ever since. It is a grotesque performance, the journalistic equivalent of Gloria Swanson's character in *Sunset Boulevard*. Unfortunately, while journalists like Dowd preen themselves, deadly enemies of the West go about their murderous business. Last week it was Bali. The week before, a French tanker off the coast of Yemen. Before that, some U.S. Marines in Kuwait. Not to mention the 3000 dead in lower Manhattan, the Pentagon, and that field in rural Pennsylvania. Such realities do not penetrate the coddled thought processes of Maureen Dowd. She is too engaged with her private arias. She is serious only as the symptom of a disorder. The question is, what should we make of a newspaper that continues to treat Maureen Dowd as a serious commentator?

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Failures of nerve

by Roger Kimball

However tactfully you dress it up, the United States had it coming.
—Mary Beard, about September 11

. . . the greatest source of terrorism on earth.
—Harold Pinter, about the United States

The real matter is the extinction of America, and God willing, it will fall to the ground.
—Mullah Mohammed Omar, Taliban leader

We are not fighting so that you will offer us something. We are fighting to eliminate you.
—Hussein Massawi, former Hezbollah leader

The first thing to note about these statements by the classicist Mary Beard, the playwright Harold Pinter, and the Islamofascists Mohammed Omar and Hussein Massawi is that they could quickly be multiplied tenfold. You will find similar statements circulating at almost any American or European university, throughout the American and European (and Arabic) press, in mosques and madrassahs—almost anywhere, in fact, that intellectual elites, or Islamic terrorists, congregate. Anti-Americanism, in both its patently murderous and fatuously sophisticated forms, is a growth industry.

Is there a connection between the Mary Beards and what Mark Steyn has aptly dubbed the weird beards of the world?—between the prattling intellectuals and the pragmatic terrorists? In an important sense the answer is Yes. "Ideas," the political philosopher Richard Weaver observed in his signature phrase, "have consequences," even bad ideas, even silly ideas, even ideas that could only come from the mind of a privileged Western intellectual too infatuated with his own importance to notice fundamental political realities. This is not to suggest that Harold Pinter (say) is responsible for Mullah Omar; it is to suggest that he helps create a climate of opinion where Mullah Omars have a better chance of thriving.

Pinterism (if I may thus eponymize this brand of intellectualizing self-hatred) is not a new phenomenon. George Orwell noted something similar in his anatomy of the pacifism that was rampant in English intellectual circles before and during World War II. The "unadmitted motive" of pacifism, Orwell wrote, was "hatred of Western democracy and admiration of totalitarianism." Harold Pinter is no John Walker Lindh. You won't find him joining up with the Taliban. But you will find him in sympathy with his spiritual colleague-in-rhetoric Susan Sontag, who explained that the assualt of September 11 was "not a 'cowardly' attack on 'civilization' or 'liberty' or 'humanity' or 'the free world' but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed super-

The essays in this special section are adapted from papers presented at a conference on anti-Americanism that was held in Tunbridge Wells, England, October 3–4. The conference was sponsored jointly by The Social Affairs Unit and The New Criterion.

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power, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions. . . . [W]hatever may be said of the perpetrators of [September 11's] slaughter, they were not cowards." Does she say, then, that they were murderous fanatics? Hardly. Sontag (like Pinter) is at once too ambivalent and too admiring for that: too ambivalent about the "world's self-proclaimed superpower" (or "rogue state," as Pinter put it) and too admiring of the insurrectionists. In this context, it is worth remembering Orwell's observation about the "processes by which pacifists who have started out with an alleged horror of violence end up with a marked tendency to be fascinated by the successes and power of Nazism."

Orwell noted that pacifism was "objectively pro-Nazi" because it inculcated an attitude that aided England's enemies. Just so, anti-Americanism is objectively pro-terrorist. It was not surprising that the Nazis did all they could to encourage pacifism among the English (just as the Soviets actively aided the anti-War movement in America in the 1960s and 1970s). Similarly, anti-Americanism helps to create a climate where terrorism is excused, rationalized, explained—explained away. We deserved it; we had it coming; arrogance; poverty; the environment; root causes . . .

Pacifism was built around phrases that sounded pleasant (peace, love, nonviolence) but that were essentially deceptive because they were unrealistic—that is, untrue to the nature of reality, to the way the world actually works (as distinct from the way we might wish that it did). "To abjure violence," Orwell noted, "it is necessary to have no experience of it." Looking back on the Spanish civil war in 1942, Orwell criticized "the sentimental belief that it all comes right in the end and the thing you most fear never really happens."

> Nourished for hundreds of years on a literature in which Right invariably triumphs in the last chapter, we believe half-instinctively that evil always defeats itself in the long run. Pacifism . . . is founded largely on this belief. Don't resist evil, and it will somehow destroy itself. But why should it? What evidence is there that it does?

While pondering that question, let us also step back and ask what America's role in the world has been over the course of the last century. The British journalist Brian Appleyard, writing in the London *Times* on September 23, 2001, registered his amazement at the orgy of anti-Americanism that greeted the terrorist attacks of Septmber 11. In one sense, he noted, there was nothing new about anti-Americanism.

> I, certainly, have always lived in a world suffused with savage anti-Americanism. In my childhood the grown-ups were all convinced that the apparently inevitable nuclear holocaust would be the fault of the Americans. In my student years I saw the Vietnam war used as an excuse for violence and intimidation that would have made Mao Tse-tung proud—indeed, my contemporaries were waving his Little Red Book, his guide to mass murder, as they attempted to storm the American embassy. I saw many of those who now weep like crocodiles burning the Stars and Stripes.

But the access of anti-Americanism that followed al Qaeda's attacks proceeded in a shriller, more virulent register than most earlier examples. It also seemed less rational. Appleyard duly noted that America was far from a perfect society. But what role had Americans actually played in "that most awful of all centuries," the twentieth?

> They saved Europe from barbarism in two world wars. After the second world war they rebuilt the continent from the ashes. They confronted and peacefully defeated Soviet communism, the most murderous system ever devised by man, and thereby enforced the slow dismantling—we hope—of Chinese communism, the second most murderous. America, primarily, ejected Iraq from Kuwait and helped us to eject Argentina from the Falklands. America stopped the slaughter in the Balkans while the Europeans dithered.

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Does it all come under the heading of "No Good Deed Goes Unpunished"? In part. There is a sense in which anti-Americanism —certain aspects of it, anyway—is the predictable function of envy, a phenomenon pointed to by the authors of *1066 and All That* when they noted that since the time of the First World War America has been the world's Top Nation. As political thinkers since Pericles have noticed, distinction breeds envy, envy breeds resentment, and, unchecked, resentment breeds hatred. But that sort of animus—lavished on Athens in her day, on Rome in hers, and on Great Britain in hers—is not by itself the sort of "anti" sentiment with which we need to concern ourselves.

Walter Bagehot came closer when he noted, in *Physics and Politics* (1872), that the enormous benefits that the English had conferred upon India—education, hygiene, the rule of law—were received with distinct ambivalence by the native population. The benefits were real, but, Bagehot apostrophized,

> What puzzles them is your constant disposition to change, or as you call it, improvement. Their own life in every detail being regulated by ancient usage, they cannot comprehend a policy which is always bringing something new; they do not a bit believe that the desire to make them comfortable and happy is the root of it; they believe, on the contrary, that you are aiming at something which they do not understand—that you mean to "take away their religion"; in a word, that the end and object of all these continual changes is to make Indians not what they are and what they like to be, but something new and different from what they are, and what they would not like to be.

The journalist Henry Fairlie made a cognate point in 1975 in his essay "Anti-Americanism at Home and Abroad." "The energy of the American presence in the world," Fairlie wrote,

> is both welcomed and feared, both a cause of hope and a source of anxiety, because with its idea it keeps unsettling the established forms of the past. Not merely old but ancient customs are surrendering to a presence that is not imposed and yet seems irresistible, to an idea that appears to be more powerful than the slogans of any revolution.

The unsettling of what Bagehot called "fixity" is a great source of cultural anxiety. It is, I suspect, a much larger ingredient in foreign complaints about the baneful influence of "vulgar" American culture than is usually acknowledged. (Not, I hasten to add, that those complaints are without merit: it is a curious irony, though, that the most effective criticisms of American culture have tended to come from conservative pro-American sources rather than from the anti-American Left.) But explanations, however accurate, however deep, can take us only so far. They always bring with them a tendency to dismiss the thing being explained—"*tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*." It is wise to take account of illuminating explanations. But it is a mistake—a mistake to which well-meaning liberals are especially prone—to believe that by understanding why a vicious character came to be that way we thereby purchase immunity from the effects of viciousness.

It has been suggested that the current outbreak of anti-Americanism, although broad, is not necessarily deep. There may be some truth in that, at least in so far as it applies to European and American anti-Americanism. (The Arab version is a more resilient strain.) Certainly, anti-Americanism comes in several versions and in differing levels of toxicity. But there is not a lot of comfort to be gleaned from that fact. For anti-Americanism is like certain infections: it can begin as a minor nuisance and, if untreated, blossom into a life-threatening condition.

Nor is there much comfort to be had from the contention that anti-Americanism in its home-grown versions is synonymous with political dissent: that it is merely a vigorous form of self-criticism. In the first

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place, it isn't true. Dissent is one thing; anti-Americanism is closer to its opposite. Indeed, anti-Americanism, because of its adversarial moralism, tends to short-circuit self-criticism. This was a point that Henry Fairlie underscored when he observed that the expression of anti-Americanism is "not criticism of one's own society; in fact it prohibits just and effective criticism" by substituting utopian fantasies for political realities.

One of those realities concerns the responsibility that accrues to those states that wield great power. It is a lesson that liberal regimes are continuously tempted to forget, to their own peril and the peril of the societies they influence. The dissolution of the British Empire—one of the most beneficient and enlightened political forces in history—took place for many reasons, including, it pains me to say, pressure from the United States. But part of the reason for its dissolution was inner uncertainty, weariness, a failure of nerve. By the middle of the last century Britain no longer wished to rule: it wanted to be liked. The promiscuous desire to be liked, for states as much as for individuals, is a profound character flaw. It signals a faltering of courage, what Pericles castigated as *malakia*, "effeminacy," and a dangerous loss of self-confidence. At the height of the Cold War, the political commentator James Burnham observed that "Americans have not yet learned the tragic lesson that the most powerful cannot be loved—hated, envied, feared, obeyed, respected, even honored perhaps, but not loved." Have we now, some forty years on, finally learned that lesson?

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, we saw plenty of deplorable outbursts of anti-Americanism: the dancing "Death to America" multitudes in the Middle East as well as the predictable responses of the Chomsky-Sontag-Pinter brigade. But we also witnessed a vast outpouring of sympathy. Some of the sympathy no doubt was genuine; much of it was oleaginous and depended on the novel spectacle of America appearing as a victim. The trouble was that America was not content to remain a victim. And when a victim fights back, he may earn respect but he forfeits sympathy and kindred sentimentalizing emotions.

When Susan Sontag said that the terrorist assaults on the United States were "undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions," she offered that observation as a partial justification or extenuation of the attacks, which it most certainly was not. But there is, I believe, another sense in which growing anti-Americanism, together with a growing climate of terrorism, can be seen as a predictable result of American actions or, more to the point, of American inaction. I am not offering a candidate for the "cause"—much less the "root cause"—of terrorism. Determining the cause of terrorism is not a difficult hermeneutical problem. Jonathan Rauch had it essentially right when he argued that the cause of terrorism is terrorists. Nevertheless, when we ask what nurtures terrorists, what may be counted on to allow them to flourish and multiply, one important answer concerns the failure of authority, which is the failure to live up to the responsibilities of power.

In the course of his reflections on anti-Americanism, Henry Fairlie observed that "Anti-Americanism abroad tends to be strongest when America itself seems to have lost confidence in its own idea." Some such loss of confidence has repeatedly afflicted the American spirit at least since the end of the Vietnam conflict. It is by now a familiar litany, but is nonetheless worth reviewing. From the mid-1970s, the United States has vacillated in discharging its responsibilities to power. Whatever the wisdom of our involvement in Vietnam, our way of extricating ourselves was ignominious and an incitement to further violence. The image of that U.S. helicopter evacuating people from our embassy in Saigon is a badge of failure, not so much of military strategy as of nerve.

Even worse was our response to the hostage crisis in Iran in 1979 and 1980. Our

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hesitation to act decisively was duly noted and found contemptible by our enemies. And the fiasco of President Carter's botched rescue attempt, when a transport vehicle and one of our helicopters collided on the sands of the Iranian desert, was a national humiliation. President Reagan did effectively face down the Soviet Union, but his halfhearted response to the terrorist bombing of a U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 contributed to the tattered reputation of America as (in Mao's phrase) "a paper tiger."

The Clinton administration sharply exacerbated the problem. From 1993 through 2000, the United States again and again demonstrated its lack of resolve even as it let its military infrastructure decay. In Somalia at the end of 1992, two U.S. helicopters were shot down, several Americans were killed, the body of one was dragged naked through the streets of Mogadishu. We did nothing—an action, or lack of action, that prompted Osama bin Laden way back then to reflect that his followers were "surprised at the low morale of the American soldiers and realized more than before that the American soldier was a paper tiger and after a few blows ran in defeat."

It was the same in 1993, when terrorists bombed the World Trade Center, killing six people and wounding scores. It was the same in June 1996, when a truck bomb exploded outside a U.S. military barracks in Saudi Arabia, killing nineteen Americans. There were some anguished words but we did—nothing. It was the same in 1998 when our embassies were bombed in Kenya and Tanzania, killing hundreds. The response was to rearrange some rocks in the Afghan desert with a few cruise missiles.

It was the same in October 2000, when suicide terrorists blew a gigantic hole in USS Cole, killing seventeen sailors and almost sinking one of the U.S. Navy's most advanced ships. Like Hamlet, we responded with "words, words, words," and only token military gestures. The harvest was an increase in contempt and a corresponding increase in terrorist outrage, culminating—this time around—in the terrible events of September 11.

My own judgment is that the current orgy of anti-Americanism, fanned to a fever pitch by talk of war with Iraq, will dissipate in proportion to the resoluteness demonstrated by the United States. If America acts decisively and successfully in Iraq, with or without the support of the United Nations, if it topples Saddam Hussein and establishes a reasonably benevolent alternative, there will, I predict, be a corresponding diminution in the fury of anti-American sentiment. I do not expect it will end the mad drivel of fantasists like Harold Pinter or connoisseurs of contempt like Susan Sontag. Nothing could do that. But I am confident that it would help move anti-Americanism off the agenda.

In his much-maligned poem "The White Man's Burden," Rudyard Kipling makes a dour prediction. "Take up the White Man's burden" of helping to civilize uncivilized parts of the world and you will, he warns, "reap his old reward":

> The blame of those ye better,
> The hate of those ye guard.

Kipling was on to something. But I wonder whether he did not overstate the case. Part of the white man's burden (let's be less politically incorrect and call it the "West's burden") he says elsewhere in that poem is conducting the "savage wars of peace." And the result of these wars is to

> Fill full the mouth of Famine
> And bid the sickness cease.

Blame? Maybe. Hate? Perhaps. But time and again history has shown that strength legitimately exercised has a sedative effect. It instills a sense of security, backed up by an attitude of respect. And in that atmosphere anti-Americanism ceases being a threat to world stability and recedes to its proper role as the pastime of cranks and impotent malcontents.

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The European project

by Gerald Frost

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Europe's anti-American vocation asserted itself from the start of the European Union. Had it done so, America would presumably have noticed. Instead of indulging the European infant, it might consequently have smothered it. But if hostility to U.S. interests and policies did not assert itself immediately, it was inevitable that it would do so at a later date. The nature of the European project and the ideology of liberal internationalism that underlies it ensured that this would be so. Opposition to U.S. goals and interests is likely to continue, and indeed to become more pronounced, unless the European Union is rebuilt on different assumptions or simply collapses.

Britain's foremost Atlanticist, the former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was as slow as most Americans in grasping the inevitability of the E.U.'s anti-Americanism. Once having done so, however, she described its possible implications with customary clarity at a conference in 1996 whose purpose, ironically, was to prevent Europe and America from drifting further apart:

> The overarching European project, which was envisaged by some from the start but which has only in recent years come out into the open, is in truth a nightmare. . . . Were it [a European superstate] to come about, another great power would have been born—equal or nearly equal in economic strength to the United States. Does anyone suppose that such a power would not soon become a rival to America? That it would not gradually discover different interests from the United States? That it would not by degrees move towards a different public philosophy—one less liberal, more statist? And that it would not eventually seek to establish its own military forces separate from those of the United States?
>
> If this new Europe were not to follow the path to separate great power status, it would be the first such power in history to renounce its independent role. It would have pioneered a new course in self-abnegation. It would have chosen moral influence over political power. The history of Europe—bloodstained, as well as idealistic—should not encourage us in these fantasies.

But all the indications suggest that Europe is at an advanced stage of making just such a choice, however fantastic this might seem to Lady Thatcher. And, indeed, to those of a conservative disposition there is much about the European project that seems fantastic or artificial.

Lady Thatcher offered only a brief description of the public philosophy to which she believed the New Europe would move. Her choice of adjectives was apt. The New Europe is quite obviously more statist than the United States (even if some, like Tony Blair, insist that Europe is "a power," not a state). It is less liberal than the United States in the classical sense of that word. But it is important to recognize a number

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of other defining characteristics. Most importantly, these include hostility to the *nation* state, a desire to manage economic and political life in such a way as to create consensus and to exclude or marginalize those whose behavior or views are judged to be out of step (in this respect the architects of New Labour and the architects of the New Europe have a good deal in common).

Hostility to the nation state is often attributed to a deeply ingrained instinct to avoid a repetition of the blood-letting which engulfed the European continent twice during the first half of the last century. But while those at the forefront of further integration stress that the New Europe is an entirely new postmodernist construct, it is difficult to ignore the similarities between the program of "ever-closer European union" (a phrase used in the founding Treaty of Rome) and corporatist and fascist theories which were current in Britain and Continental Europe in the late 1920s and 1930s. These too favored an end to the "obsolete" system of nation states on the grounds of its alleged instability, arguing that larger regional groupings were in any case inevitable in economic terms as the result of improvements of communications and transport. And in common with the architects of present-day Europe they, too, sought a European currency zone, asserting that while markets and entrepreneurs had a role they lacked a social conscience and must therefore be managed in the common good. The following quotation from a speech by the former French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur would not have been out of place coming from the economics spokesman of the German National Socialist Party:

> Can we [West Europeans] take it for granted that we will remain sufficient leaders in a sufficient number of sectors to survive—in the face of countries with populations infinitely larger than ours and with levels of social protection infinitely smaller. I say we should leave this to the market, but only up to a certain point. What is the market? It is the law of the jungle, the law of nature. And what is civilization? It is the struggle against nature.

Along with a public philosophy distinctly different from that of the Unites States comes a different conception of power. While Europe rejects the use of force, seeking to enter what Robert Kagan described as "a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity," the United States remains on the more recognizable Hobbesian terrain of struggle and conflict. Indeed, one of the many ironies of the present situation, as Kagan has also pointed out, is that if Europe ("a military pygmy" in George Robertson's phrase) arrives safely at its destination this can only be because the United States has remained outside on guard. Such an outcome also presupposes America's willingness to overlook the rising chorus of scathing criticism of America coming from within.

The clash of public philosophies ensures that there will be disagreements with Europe at the political, economic, and strategic and environmental level. Current differences include those over Iraq, Palestine, ballistic missile defense, and the role of arms control, the International Criminal Court, genetically modified crops, the Kyoto accords, farm support, and a substantial raft of trade issues.

At the time of the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983, Henry Kissinger remarked that the problem with the European allies was not that they wished America to fail but that they would rather that it did not try to do anything in the first place.

In the case of Iraq most Europeans do not wish America to fail in the sense of wishing to observe the return of large numbers of body bags on their television news programs, but many do not wish it to succeed. Success would not only demonstrate America's vast military and economic superiority, but would also call into question Europe's postmodern vision of the world. For much the same reason Europeans are opposed to the creation of

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ballistic missile defense: according to the European vision, there should be no need either for military intervention in Iraq or for the construction of active systems to defend against missile attack by terrorists or rogue states. The problems with which these are intended to deal can be most effectively dealt with through multilateralism, diplomacy, and economic aid. Such attitudes lead readily to the belief that where liberal panaceas fail to prevent terrorist outrages, it can only be because of defects in the international order for which the one remaining superpower must take primary responsibility. One has only to take one small step further to conclude that the real cause of extreme or violent anti-Americanism is U.S. policy.

Plans for "regime change" in Iraq, like those to build missile defenses, thus encounter visceral opposition in Europe, because success in this area would represent the triumph of "hard power" over "soft power"—while greatly enhancing America's reputation and influence. This is bound to irk those who wish to establish a rule-bound international order based on moral consciousness, transnational cooperation, and negotiation. Just how irked was apparent from a British Foreign Office briefing following President Bush's "axis of evil speech," during which senior F.O. officials advised John Simpson, the BBC's foreign editor, that President Bush was "a bear of remarkably little brain." For good measure they added that as a result of the speech—which they described as "puerile," "absurdly ignorant," and "ludicrous"—Anglo-American relations were at "a shockingly low ebb."

The reason that this particular president should arouse hostility is not difficult to fathom. Under Clinton it was possible to believe America was part of the liberal international consensus to which most European politicians themselves publicly subscribe. But by withdrawing from or refusing to ratify agreements and structures, including the ABM Treaty, the International Criminal Court, and the Kyoto Agreement, President Bush cruelly dashed such dreams. In bypassing NATO in the interests of political and operational clarity following the events of September 11th, the President further demonstrated his willingness to act unilaterally where the pursuit of multilateral solutions did not serve America's fundamental interests.

For a time many European leaders responded to the sudden change in Washington by representing the Bush presidency as an historical aberration which would be followed by a return to normality once the right people in the State Department had taken control. Declaring that he did not possess "a single anti-American bone in [his] body," Chris Patten, the E.U.'s (unelected) Commissioner for External Affairs, still talks about the present administration in such a way as to suggest a total disconnection between the executive and the American people. And of course it is always possible to find American voices in U.S. universities and think-tanks to endorse such judgments: when it comes to anti-Americanism, Americans evidently like to do things bigger and better than others. But the President's enduring popularity at home and the fact that the warnings of his European critics have been confounded by events mean that it will be harder to maintain this line of argument for very much longer. The scrapping of the ABM treaty—"the cornerstone of stability" in Bill Clinton's memorable phrase—did not lead to the predicted arms race with Russia, but to the biggest arms reduction agreement in modern times. The events of September 11 did not lead to a reckless, precipitate, and disproportionate U.S. revenge attack, as was so widely predicted, but to the creation of a U.S.-led military coalition and the removal of the Taliban.

In Commissioner Patten's continuing criticisms of the American "hegemon," it is impossible not to notice the authentic strains of an emergent Euro-nationalism. *If only Europe was running the show*: "Frankly, smart bombs matter, but smart development assistance matters more." Or again:

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"*We* know how important it is to handle failed states properly—and to prevent them failing in the first place. *We* know how to tackle the root causes of terrorism and violence (italics added)."

American politicians who presume to take issue with their European critics are treated with the same combination of sarcasm and superiority. Writing in a British Sunday newspaper, John Simpson responded in typical vein to a speech by Donald Rumsfeld in which the U.S. Defense Secretary had robustly but politely drawn attention to weaknesses in the German policy: "In Washington the other morning, Donald Rumsfeld, President Bush's defense secretary, his rimless glasses glinting and his hair scraped back as though it was the first thing he had attacked that morning, stepped up to the microphone and launched a pre-emptive strike. On Germany." Given the anti-American rhetoric of German politicians during Germany's recent elections—including one who compared the U.S. President to Hitler—the word "pre-emptive" might seem somewhat out of place. But then Simpson, like Patten and like his senior contacts at the British F.O., evidently feels more threatened by U.S. action to deal with the problem of Saddam and his weapons of mass distruction than by the weapons themselves. This despite the fact that for obvious reasons of geography Europe is more threatened by ballistic missiles based in the middle east than the United States is.

Those broad-shouldered Americans who are apt to dismiss European anti-Americanism as little more than a reflection of French concern about the survival of their language, cinema, and cuisine, or of fading German neuroses should not be deceived. There is currently no alternative vision to which Europe may turn. Britain may provide robust military support in Iraq, as it did during the Gulf War and on other occasions, but if foreign and security policy becomes "a European competence" determined by qualified majority voting (a weighted system of voting which reflects the different sizes of member states). It could be Britain's last independent military intervention on the international stage on the side of America, or indeed of anyone else. For forty years the U.S. invested heavily in European integration and looked forward to the time when at moments of crisis it would be possible to call a single European telephone number. Now that this once distant objective seems in sight the United States is beginning to realize that the man at the other end of the phone may be distinctly unhelpful.

The good news, if such there is, is that the European nationalism that feeds anti-Americanism is very largely a minority taste and is likely to remain so, being confined to metropolitan elites, and to those on the payroll. Artificial states do not appeal to patriotic feelings. Attempts to purchase such patriotism—and there are many such attempts—are more likely to create dependency and resentment than to create a European consciousness while at the same time irritating the taxpayer. The attempt to create a genuine European democracy—or at least to give the impression of doing so—will founder in the absence of a European demos, of which there is no prospect.

Moreover, it is evident that the liberal democratic consensus about Europe's future is by no means as secure, its apparent ascendancy the product of cynical calculation as well as idealism, and its long term prospects threatened by its lack of democratic legitimacy.

Half a century ago de Gaulle dreamed of a Europe that could match U.S. defense capability, and thus exert a comparable influence in the world. In the wake of the Soviet collapse, French ministers were still able to contemplate, however fancifully, the emergence of a European power to provide some kind of balance to the new American "hyper power" that, left unchallenged, would threaten international stability. As recently as 1999 President Chirac believed that the Anglo-French agreement reached at

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St. Malo (which for the first time committed Britain to military cooperation with other European states outside the NATO framework) would lay the foundations of a European Army under French leadership. But since then the absurdity of such pretensions has been exposed by events. Gaullists and others on the center right of European politics who might have preferred that rivalry with the United States would take some more traditional form, now see the impossibility of such a course; they consequently perceive some merit in competing in a race in which the U.S. is not participating: that of moral exhortation and rule making. This at least allows them the satisfaction of frustrating America, but it does not make them liberal internationalists. But such stratagems are likely to have a strictly limited shelf-life, and there is no sign that under its present leadership France wishes to surrender French nationhood. As in 1990–1991, French opposition to U.S. military action in Iraq is likely to cease at the moment that the French President recognizes that it can't be stopped, and that the *national* interest would be served by being on the winning side. At the time of writing, there is already some indication that President Chirac is softening his opposition to a U.S.-led action to remove Saddam. In Britain, opposition to further European political integration—and, in particular, membership of a single currency—places distinct constraints on the Government's European ambitions.

In the long run it seems highly probable the European project will founder because of the inability of liberal internationalism to correspond to important political and economic realities. In the short and medium term the European Union may possess the ability to annoy America and occasionally to frustrate it—although only at the price of encouraging what it describes as U.S. unilateralism. Its capacity to do so during this period, however, will be greatly exceeded by its ability to harm the economic and security interests of millions of Europeans. It is this thought which should encourage Eurosceptics on this side of the Atlantic to lay plans for a better future, and Americans to believe in the possibility of better European allies.

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The politics of envy

by Paul Hollander

Until recently, anti-Americanism attracted little serious attention among social scientists and intellectuals. Apparently it was not considered worthy of study or close scrutiny, because it was rarely seen as a pathology that required better understanding. Unlike other more researched, consensually reprehensible attitudes and prejudices, such as racism, sexism, anti-semitism, and homophobia, anti-Americanism was regarded among the intelligentsia as a more or less natural phenomenon, perhaps regrettable but easy to explain and largely justified.

Admittedly, anti-Americanism is not easy to study given its diffuseness, varieties, endless sources, and the difficulty in locating it on the spectrum of political attitudes and positions. Anti-Americanism may be associated with radical revolutionaries or with the guardians of traditional moralities and social orders. There is anti-Americanism on the left as well as the right. Intense anti-Americanism sometimes makes the extreme right and extreme left hard to distinguish from one another. Noam Chomsky, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, or Gore Vidal would have found little to quarrel with in the statement of Istvan Csurka, leader of the radical right-wing party in Hungary, who, following September 11, said "this event was bound to happen. The oppressed people of the world could not tolerate without a counter-blow the humiliations, the exploitations, and the purposeful genocide taking place in Palestine."

Anti-Americanism can be found in both highly developed, complex Western societies and in the most backward ones of the Third World; it can be found in the remaining communist states as well as the post-communist ones. Identification and analysis are complicated by their tendencies to shade into ambivalence.

Anti-American rhetoric often denigrates the United States by comparing and equating it with something self-evidently worse, such as Nazi Germany, the former Soviet Union, or apartheid-era South Africa. During the Cold War, anti-Americanism found expression in the moral-equivalence thesis that held there was little to choose, morally speaking, between the United States and the Soviet Union. Even in this comparative framework, the United States was, as a rule, savaged with far greater relish and specificity while critiques of the Soviet system were few and perfunctory.

Paradoxically, anti-Americanism has always coexisted with a fervent desire of vast numbers of people around the world to come and live in this much maligned country; to this day it remains difficult to keep them out. Even those who harbor no such aspirations widely imitate American fashions, fads, and patterns of consumption, and look to American mass culture for entertainment. In light of these observations it is tempting to suggest that anti-Americanism is mainly the malaise of intellectuals, quasi-intellectuals, and those influenced by them.

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Still, even ordinary people with little education are susceptible to it when blaming the United States becomes a readily available, soothing alternative to confronting the real sources of their distress and taking responsibility for them.

The major dimensions or types of anti-Americanism include the long-standing historical/theoretical version (currently intertwined with "postmodernism" and "multiculturalism") rooted in the rejection of universalistic values and especially the rationalism associated with the Enlightenment. This form of anti-Americanism shades into a broad anti-Western disposition.

There is an anti-Americanism that is barely distinguishable from anti-capitalism (a tributary of Marxism), viewing the United States as both the pillar of capitalism around the world and its most repugnant embodiment.

There is a cultural anti-Americanism that focuses on American mass culture, (correctly) seen as an integral part of American society. And there is a conservative anti-Americanism that suspects all that is new and lacking in traditional legitimation.

Anti-Americanism as a by-product of nationalistic grievances, resentments, and competitive disadvantage is among its most prominent incarnations. Weakness is a major stimulant of anti-Americanism.

In my study of the phenomenon a decade ago, I defined anti-Americanism as a hostile *predisposition* that may range from distaste and aversion to intense hostility, rooted in conditions and circumstances that are often largely unrelated to the actual qualities or attributes of American society, institutions, values, or foreign policy. I compared anti-Americanism to other hostile predispositions such as racism, antisemitism, sexism, or various kinds of ethnic prejudice. Stereotyping that involves exaggeration, distortion, and contempt is an integral part of anti-Americanism, especially as regards (what is seen as) the American national character, cultural norms, tastes, manners, and ways of life.

In my original definition I failed to note that anti-American sentiments may culminate in political violence; at the time most forms of anti-Americanism appeared largely rhetorical or otherwise expressed in ways short of mass murder.

The scapegoating impulse is central to anti-Americanism, followed by envy and ambivalence. It is not difficult to explain why the United States has become a symbol, the entity upon which a wide range of grievances and resentments can be projected. Not only has the United States been powerful and wealthy, it has also generated high expectations both at home and abroad, promises of opportunity and fulfillment that cannot be fully realized.

From the sociological and historical points of view, anti-Americanism may best be understood as a diffuse, ongoing protest against modernity—its major components and unintended consequences. These include secularization, industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, mobility (both social and spatial), and the decline of community and social-cultural cohesion. Less obvious is how and why modernity nurtures anti-Americanism even in societies that are stable, democratic, wealthy, and thoroughly modernized—as opposed to those societies that are in the throes of uneasy and ineffectual modernization that undermines old certainties and social organizations, while yielding few tangible material benefits.

The most obvious and clear link between anti-Americanism and modernization is encountered in Islamic countries and other traditional societies where modernization clashes head on with entrenched traditional beliefs, institutions, and patterns of behavior, and where it challenges the very meaning of life, social relations, and religious verities. What becomes of the world when women can go to work and show large surfaces of skin to men they are not related to? In a recent case, the indignant male members of a Kurdish family in Sweden were "provoked" by the transgressing female of their family who had the

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temerity to have a job and a boyfriend and dress in Western ways. She was finally killed by her father. According to the *New York Times* correspondent reporting the matter, "[her] desire for independence . . . turn[ed] her into the tragic emblem of a European society's failure to bridge the gap . . . between its own culture and those of its newer arrivals." These comments also exemplify the guilty, anti-modernist impulse of the journalist seeking to implicate a Western society in the kind of criminality traditional morality sometimes sanctions.

In Arab countries and among Muslim populations, anti-Americanism is not only the monopoly of intellectuals but also a widespread disposition of the masses. In these areas, traditional religion, radical politics, and economic backwardness combine to make anti-Americanism an exceptionally widespread, virulent, and reflexive response to a wide range of collective and personal frustrations and grievances—and a welcome alternative to any collective or individual self-examination or stock-taking.

More generally, it is the rise of alternatives, ushered in by modernization, that threatens traditional societies and generates anti-American reaction. The stability of traditional society (like that of modern totalitarian systems) rests on the lack of alternatives, on the lack of choice. Choice is deeply subversive—culturally, politically, psychologically.

The recent outburst of murderous anti-Americanism has added a new dimension to the phenomenon, or at any rate, throws into relief the intense hatred it may encapsulate. The violence of September 11 shows that when anti-Americanism is nurtured by the kind of indignation and resentment that in turn is stimulated and sanctioned by religious convictions, it can become spectacularly destructive. Suicide killings have not been unknown in history, but usually they were directed at important military and political targets—not at symbolic ones (such as buildings) or at undifferentiated non-combatants who, like other victims of political mass murders in recent history, have been killed for what they are (Americans, or in Israel, Jews) not for what they did. (Anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish violence has become intertwined with anti-Americanism; in the minds of Islamic fanatics, Israel, Jews, and the United States are a closely linked evil entity.)

A new stage has been reached in the development and history of anti-Americanism when the United States and all things American are identified with a religiously defined, transcendent Evil and not merely with social injustice, moral corruption, economic exploitation, or the abuse of power as used to be the case until recently.

One would expect anti-Americanism to be mainly a phenomenon outside the United States, but this also is not the case. Domestic anti-Americanism has for a long time been as vigorous as its foreign varieties, although it is largely limited to the intelligentsia. Even the events of September 11 became for them an occasion for vilifying the United States and for taking a new, expanded inventory of its numberless misdeeds, past and present. The hostile critics claim that the attacks originated in "root causes" (all of which had something to do with the folly or evil of American society and U.S. policies) and that these attacks were fully understandable responses to the many wrongheaded, selfish, irresponsible, and corrupt American policies and postures. These include U.S. support for Israel and repression of Palestinians, for upholding global inequality, for exploiting the poor, for plundering the resources of the world, for conducting militaristic policies, and for erecting provocatively tall buildings that symbolize American capitalistic greed. The preeminent French anti-American intellectual Jean Baudrillard found these buildings no less horrific than the terrorist attacks on them: "In terms of collective drama we can say that the horror for the 4000 [sic] victims of dying in those towers was inseparable from the horror of living and working in sarcophagi of concrete and

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steel." His suggestion of moral equivalence is reminiscent of Eric Foner's predicament when he could not decide "which is more frightening: the horror that engulfed New York City or the apocalyptic rhetoric emanating daily from the White House." Chomsky, never prey to such uncertainties, has long been convinced that the United States is the "leading terrorist state." This is a conviction he shares with Gore Vidal, who wanted "readers seriously to consider that the Oklahoma City bombing was a conspiracy by federal agents . . . to justify further strengthening of the American terror-police state."

Domestic or native anti-Americanism is a more mysterious and puzzling phenomenon than the foreign varieties, but it too can be linked to the problems and afflictions of modernity, and especially to the spiritual emptiness and social isolation associated with it.

"Inauthenticity" is a key component of the criticism directed at American society and culture both at home and abroad. It is linked both to spiritual emptiness and more specifically to mass culture, the consumer ethos, the fraudulence associated with commerce, the pursuit of profit, and capitalist competitiveness. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke captured these sentiments in the early twentieth century, speaking of

> the American way of life in which all products have lost their connection with anything real or human. . . . [F]or our grandparents . . . a house, a well, a familiar tower, even their own pieces of clothing [were] something intimate and meaningful. . . . Now is emerging from out of America pure undifferentiated things, mere things of appearance, sham articles. . . . A house, in the American understanding, an American apple, or an American vine has nothing in common with the house, the fruit, or the grape that had been adopted in the hopes and thoughts of our forefathers.

In our times, similar anti-American sentiments generate protests against McDonald's and Wal-Mart, "ticky tacky" houses in the suburbs, the omnipresence of plastics, or the difficulty of finding organic produce in the nearest supermarket.

Complaints about inauthenticity and standardization illuminate the romantic, individualistic components of what (I call) cultural anti-Americanism found in the United States and other Western societies. Romantic anti-Americanism has much in common with romantic anti-capitalism, which in turn is an integral part of the aversion to the rationalistic ethos of the French Enlightenment.

Another remarkable convergence may be discerned between the Marxist critiques of capitalist modernity and those emanating in our times from traditionalist societies and their spokesmen who attack Americanization—that is to say, the power of American capitalism to erode, degrade, and demystify all that is sacred, unique, and time honored:

> uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated. . . . *All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned* and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind (from the *Communist Manifesto* [1848], my emphasis added.)

Anti-Americanism was also a centerpiece in the vast propaganda campaigns of communist systems, especially in the former Soviet Union. These states sought (some still do) to capitalize on spontaneous anti-Americanism, and they devoted substantial resources to stimulate it wherever possible. As far as their own peoples were concerned these campaigns were quite ineffectual, since citizens of communist countries mistrusted official propaganda and often had alternative sources of information about the world outside. The official anti-Americanism—as much of the official

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propaganda in general—backfired: what the authorities denounced, the populace approached with sympathetic curiosity.

The communist campaigns of anti-American disinformation probably had more of an impact outside these countries. For example, Soviet allegations that the United States created and disseminated the AIDS virus to decimate third-world populations were not rejected out of hand in these countries, and a good deal of anti-nuclear propaganda seeking to disarm the West had some influence in Western Europe.

It might have been plausible to expect a decline of global as well as domestic anti-Americanism in the wake of the collapse of Soviet communism. On the one hand, a major source of anti-American propaganda ceased to exist; on the other, at least in theory, the juxtaposition of the fall of state socialism with the survival of vigorous democratic capitalism could have conclusively discredited the apparent and alleged alternatives to Western democracy and capitalism the United States has represented. This, however, did not happen. Anti-Americanism has persisted and, arguably, increased in Western Europe, in post-communist Russia, and above all in the Islamic world.

The "last remaining superpower" status doubtlessly contributed to the recent upsurges of anti-Americanism, making it more plausible to blame the United States for a wide variety of problems all over the world. The ability and willingness to intervene in conflicts abroad (in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq) lent more plausibility to the image of the United States as a reckless, irresponsible, militarist superpower throwing its weight around. There have also been trade disputes between the European Union and the United States that suggest that the current administration sometimes prefers to support American farmers and steel makers at the expense of upholding the principles of free trade. These are matters that invite reasonable criticism but at the same time also feed anti-Americanism which by (my) definition has a large irrational component.

The personality and qualifications of our current president too has contributed to recent manifestations of anti-Americanism; like Reagan, George W. Bush invites stereotypes of the "cowboy," the "airhead" and, with better justification, the critique that he is an all-too-eager supporter of big business. His environmental policies and indifference to conservation, or at least to a more prudent use of energy, appear to derive from an excessively pro-business mentality that he and much of his cabinet share.

Dwelling on aspects of American society that invite criticism of a more rational kind almost inevitably leads to some somber reflections about American mass culture. No friend of America, domestic or foreign, can easily dispute that mass culture enshrines mindlessness, triviality, the cult of violence, a shallow sentimentality, and a pervasive entertainment orientation that has had discernible effect on the whole society including its political, educational, artistic, and religious institutions. I am well aware that mass culture is popular all over the world, and that is does not represent a coercive imposition upon the masses yearning for cheaper CDs of Bach cantatas or Beethoven string quartets. Nonetheless its existence and influence make a substantial contribution not only to anti-Americanism but also to more informed critiques of American society.

Much of what people fear or dislike about American society and culture is synonymous with modernity, or aspects thereof. Americanization is the major, perhaps the only, widespread form of modernization. The process—as we all know—involves gains as well as losses. The anti-American reaction dwells on the losses and ignores the gains. Anti-Americanism is a reaction against the same process of modernization most people yearn for, but that when advanced or attained leads to second thoughts, to doubts, and to reservations and irreconcilable desires and demands that

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cannot be met or, when they are, create disappointment. I am reminded here of what Daniel Boorstin wrote almost half a century ago about Americans and their attitude toward vacation travel:

> We expect our two week vacation to be romantic, exotic, cheap and effortless. We expect a faraway atmosphere if we go to a nearby place; and we expect everything to be relaxing, sanitary and Americanized if we go to a faraway place. We expect the contradictory and the impossible. . . . Never have people been more the masters of their environment yet never has a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world can offer.

The attitude sketched above is not confined to Americans and vacation travel, but it is most conspicuous in this society given the high expectations American culture and history have always generated and encouraged. It is these high expectations and their recurring frustration that best explain domestic anti-Americanism, that is to say, alienation, adversary culture, embittered social criticism, the reflexive rejection of the whole social system, and its supporting values. The frustration of these high expectations also explains the often voiced feeling that America failed to live up to its promises and potentials.

Wherever it appears, anti-Americanism is a response—however indirect—to the burdens and conflicts of choice and freedom and to living in a world that no longer provides the cushion of community and the web of taken-for-granted beliefs that protect against the specters of meaninglessness and spiritual void.

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Retreats into fantasy

by David Pryce-Jones

Returning home from a journey to Arabia in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the explorer and historian Carsten Niebuhr put in at Alexandria. Once ashore, he used an instrument for surveying the landscape. Some intrigued Egyptians asked to handle it. What they then saw through the lenses was incomprehensibly upside down. Niebuhr was thrown into prison for sorcery. Some decades later, the great Richard Burton, disguised as Haj Ibrahim, was on the pilgrimage to Mecca, a city forbidden to all except Muslims to this very day. In his baggage was a compass which he hardly dared use, living in fear that its discovery would lead to his murder. Stories of the kind encapsulate what was already by then the unequal relationship between the world of Islam and the West.

Islam in the years of its triumph had conquered and colonized from Morocco to Indonesia, from Central Asia down to sub-Saharan Africa. Caliphs, sultans, emirs, khans had ruled diverse empires whose monuments were often splendid, and whose achievements in various branches of learning were lasting. In practice Muslims might war with each other, but the faithful were held to comprise a community. Precluding any possibility of power-sharing, this amalgamation of mosque and state ensured absolutism and placed all minorities, whether schismatics or infidels, in a precarious position. Christians and Jews had their place in classical Muslim society as *dhimmi*, subjects protected by law but under a special regime of prohibitions and taxes: in modern parlance second-class citizens. In the rightful ordering of the world, Muslims could take their own supremacy for granted. They saw themselves standing against the West and its Crusades; they imagined that unbelievers were conspiring in an unrelieved hostility to Islam. Whatever Christians or Jews might actually be doing in faraway lands was of no concern. Out of predilection, pride, prejudice, ignorance, Muslims were condemning themselves to remaining outside the main intellectual developments of the rest of the world. Unawares, they would be losing control of their own history.

Niebuhr's Egyptians were still able to feel uncritical confidence in themselves and their civilization. A few years later, Napoleon landed at Alexandria, and soon afterwards Nelson and the British sailed in pursuit. The West had arrived on Muslim soil. One or two Egyptian contemporaries chronicled these unprecedented invasions. As Bernard Lewis describes it, they showed no concern about the internal history of France or the rest of Europe. "The French had come, they stayed a while, they did various things, and they left. No one cared to ask, let alone to ascertain, why they had come and why they had left. The coming of the infidel was seen as a kind of natural disaster."

A sequence of events was under way in which the strength of the infidels, the

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Europeans, generically Westerners, came to match ever more starkly the corresponding weakness of the faithful, generically Muslims. The nineteenth century was a catastrophe for Muslims. By the end of the First World War, the last two Muslim empires were shadows of themselves. Persia was a hapless pawn between Russia and Britain. Turkey managed to fight for survival in its heartland, but its former European provinces were lost and its former Arab provinces were at the disposition of the British and French, even the Italians in Libya. Of Muslim countries, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia alone remained nominally independent.

What was to be done about this state of affairs? Born in 1838, a Shia from Persia, and an adventurer and intriguer who worked his way into several royal courts, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani believed that he had discovered the secret of European supremacy. Muslims, he did not hesitate to say, were backward. The self-pity came from the heart. But the Europeans were nothing in themselves. In his view, "Rather it is science that everywhere manifests its greatness and power." Acquiring science, the Muslims could catch up. Afghani captured it in a phrase: "It is amazing that it is precisely the Christians who invented Krupp's cannons and the machine gun before the Muslims." The analysis was incomplete: the invention of such weaponry had nothing to do with the supposed Christianity of the inventors. Science grew out of a civilization, and was not some commodity to be readily imported. But the implied course of action was clear. Afghani hoped that Islamic society would "succeed some day in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path of civilization, after the manner of Western society."

Some Muslim leaders, like the Emir Abdel Kadir in Algeria, or some of the Central Asian and Indian rulers, had organized armed resistance, but initially the masses felt strikingly little resentment at the encroachment on their society of Westerners. They seemed to have accepted that these Westerners had come, were staying a while, and were doing various things. Many fought in British or French uniforms, and sometimes against other Muslims. But it was Westerners themselves who began to insist that there was something disgraceful in their own presence in the Muslim world. This was imperialism. This was colonialism. This was exploitation. Lenin and Trotsky said so, and so did the leftists J. A. Hobson and Bernard Shaw and the Fabians, and the rightist Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and increasingly countless academics in countless universities, and increasingly countless commentators in print. If the opinion-makers of the day saw Muslims as hapless pawns in the hands of greedy and powerful foreigners, how was a Muslim to react? Many could not help internalizing what they heard, and feeling ashamed. An enormous literature reveals how painful it was for Muslims to learn that in the eyes of influential Westerners they were held in contempt, and were apparently impotent to do anything about it.

The reality was complex. No doubt some Westerners, for instance soldiers in garrisons, were insular and even racist, but many more were concerned to restore an equal relationship between Muslims and Westerners. Still others were at pains to understand the people and the culture they encountered. Much Western scholarship has explored and vivified Islam. Another large literature describes qualities which Westerners particularly admired among Muslims, their human warmth, humor, poetry, manners, sense of family, respect for the old, and not least their history and religion.

From the days of Homer's Greeks and Trojans onwards, shame has been the forerunner of hate and violence. In what anthropologists call a shame society, the acquisition of honor and its converse, the avoidance of shame, are the keys to motivation. A man cannot be reasoned out of shame; it becomes a passion which burns and consumes until such time as it is avenged. Nationalist movements were built

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upon this passion. British policemen used to report with surprise that nationalist demonstrators wept tears of rage, or fell down in what appeared to be fainting fits. The age of colonialism contained a guaranteed expiration date, and the Second World War brought it forward. Europeans evidently could hardly rule themselves, let alone others, and their moral authority was lost. By the middle of the twentieth century, in one Muslim country after another, nationalist leaders and movements had coalesced with the promise of regaining independence.

In the superficial sense that they seized power and initiated regimes, the nationalist leaders of the 1950s and 1960s succeeded. In some countries, for example in Indonesia, Malaysia, and sub-Saharan Africa, they seemed to have restored the rightful sense of dignity to their people. In the Arab countries, however, independence has brought neither freedom nor dignity but one-man rule secured by a single party and the military and secret police apparatus. The archetypal Arab leader remains Gamal Abdul Nasser, the undisputed leader of Egypt from 1953 till his death in 1970. What he claimed to be building was Arab socialism. What in fact he built was a second-hand totalitarian state with neither human rights, nor respect for life and property. Other Arab countries, even those that were nominally monarchies, imitated the model or deferred to it, also relying on the military and secret police apparatus. All have acquired the range of modern externals from fly-overs to weaponry, but none have thereby satisfied Afghani's ambition to march in the path of civilization "after the manner of Western society." The seeds of disappointment and hate are planted in the tyranny of the Arab and Muslim order.

What is the cause of this massive political and social failure? It is in part that Arab nationalism and socialism are alien ideologies internalized from European Nazism and Communism, and therefore repeats of models as bankrupt as they were violent. It is also in part because democracy and free elections and the rule of law carried the taint of the colonial powers which had introduced these novelties in the first place. And in part it is due to the Islamic tradition of absolutism now perpetuated in contemporary garb.

The United States' involvement in the Middle East began as colonialism was ending. Its realpolitik interest lay in securing oil supplies through the "twin pillars" of Iran and Saudi Arabia. The United States had no objection to Arab nationalism or socialism—and at the time no real understanding of the movements. Nasser and his equivalents in Syria and Iraq were initially seen with approval as "officers in a hurry," the assumption being that they were getting on with the necessary job of modernizing somehow "after the manner of Western society."

Coming into existence in 1948, the state of Israel has defied regular attempts by its Arab neighbors to destroy it. Arab nationalist rulers from Nasser onwards were willing to become Soviet proxies, if that was the price to be paid for the destruction of Israel. The Middle East therefore became a prime arena of the cold war. The United States shared Israel's human and democratic values. Without American support, Israel would still have won its wars, but at a higher cost. Victorious round after round, Israel exposed the pretensions of Arab nationalism and socialism to be maximizing power in a new glorious age. The Arab world is in an uncomfortable bind, obliging Israel to fight for survival, and then having to accept defeat on the battlefield. Centuries of Muslim stereotyping affirm that the despised and numerically insignificant Jews could never achieve such a thing on their own. To explain away the unbearable humiliation of it, a view has taken hold of the Arab and Muslim imagination that there is a malign American-Israeli imperialist nexus, nothing less than a conspiracy which represents everything to be hated and feared about the West.

The failure of Arab nationalism and so-

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cialism opened the way to political Islam. In the past, charismatic leaders have often arisen with a mission to redeem or purify Islam. In Egypt in 1928 Hassan al-Banna, a schoolmaster, founded the Muslim Brotherhood. According to the official account, some Egyptians said to him, "We are weary of this life of humiliation and restriction. Lo, we see that the Arabs and the Muslims have no status and no dignity." Islam was the solution. The Western way of life, al-Banna asserted, might be founded on practical and technical knowledge but it "has remained incapable of offering to men's minds a flicker of light, a ray of hope, a grain of faith." More dire still, the West, or as he called it, "religious and cultural imperialism," deliberately conspired to destroy Islam. Political idiom drawn from current European ideologies fused with stereotypes set in place in the long-ago battles against Crusaders.

Another Egyptian, Sayyid Qutb, has popularized and glossed the mindset. Born in Cairo in 1906, he studied literature and was familiar with the English language. From 1948 to 1950 he was on a government grant to study education in the United States. As a result of this experience, he concluded that America was the source of all evil. Christianity with its notion of sin and redemption made no sense. Capitalism was "predicated on monopoly and interest-taking, money-grubbing and exploitation." American individualism lacked "any sense of solidarity other than that laid down by the law." Relations between the sexes particularly shocked him, and he attacked "that animal freedom which is called permissiveness." Muslims who allowed themselves any truck with Western ideas and practices he considered were in a state of *jahiliyya*, that is to say, the pagan ignorance prevailing before the Prophet Muhammad's divine revelation. Rebellion was their religious duty. He put this militancy into practice in Egypt, and Nasser duly had him hanged in 1966.

The clash between Arab nationalism and socialism on the one hand and political Islam on the other was bound to result in tests of strength between them, and some of these—in Egypt, in Syria, in Algeria—have been murderous on a large scale. What was essentially an issue for Arabs and Muslims to resolve among themselves became international after 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in Iran, and political Islam at last could operate at the level of a nation-state among other nation-states. Only about one in ten Muslims are Shia, and historical experience at the hands of Sunnis has reinforced their minority status and a resulting sense of persecution. Combining absolute political and religious authority, Khomeini did everything in his power to gain acceptance for the belief that America was conspiring with other unbelievers to destroy Muslims and their heritage. Quite why America would entertain so wanton and pointless an aim never concerned him. In his emotive image, the Great Satan needed no other motive but wickedness. Muslims now had official sanction to hate the United States. Islamist rhetoric raised the level of violence. One Muslim country after another sponsored terrorist groups, and several went on to develop weapons of mass destruction. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani would have appreciated that Pakistan brandishes what it likes to call "the Islamic nuclear bomb."

The United States today is a spectacle of success and power, and the Muslim reaction to it certainly contains admiration for its achievements, its medicine and its education, and of course its freedoms. Themselves living in tyrannies, Arabs and almost all Muslims are unable to enjoy such benefits unless they are fortunate enough to acquire the talisman of the green card and can emigrate. Into the complicated emotion of hate are woven strands of envy, impotence, shame, and self-pity. Failure is increasingly and inescapably oppressive to the Muslim order. To blame others for the ills one has brought down on oneself is only human. Self-pity is always easier than self-

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criticism. The retreat into fantasy and conspiracy consoles, and also mobilizes.

So Osama bin Laden is able to recruit tens of thousands of Islamist volunteers, and to order a series of murders including the attacks of September 11. For this he becomes a genuine hero in his native Saudi Arabia, and crowds dance in his honor in Arab and Pakistani cities, while at the very same time the rumor spreads that Jews perpetrated the attacks to discredit Muslims. So the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, the leading Sunni authority, can describe suicide bombing as "a legitimate act according to religious law, and an Islamic commandment." So a Lebanese intellectual proudly tells a Western reporter, "We could provide a million suicide bombers in 24 hours." Prince Sultan bin Abdel Aziz, a leading member of the Saudi ruling dynasty and father of the Saudi ambassador to Washington, is able to say to a newspaper, "It is enough to see a number of congressmen wearing Jewish yarmulkes to explain the allegations against us." The leader of the terrorist group Hezbollah asserts that "The Jews want to be a world power" and organizes terrorist means to attack them, while Ali Khamenei, President of Iran, calls the United States "the biggest bully in the world," and his newspaper adds that "Bush's culture is Hitler's culture." The Palestinian Sheikh Ahmad Yassin of Hamas, the Islamist terror organization, promises to eliminate Israel from the Middle East, and extremists claim that one day the United States will live under Islamic law. For an unquantifiable number of Muslims, these fantasies and conspiracies—these set-backs and putative glories—have become an identity, and their voices are now so many trumpet calls.

Merging at the emotional level as they do, Arab nationalist-socialists and Islamists generate a climate that encourages the spread of violence to everyone within reach, of all religious faiths and cultures including their own. In their origins, both ideologies purported to regain power, but in practice they have served to condemn Muslims to live outside the creativity of today's world and so consummate loss of control over their own history. By virtue of its current political and economic pre-eminence, the United States is a symbol simultaneously of the success of people deemed to be unworthy, and of the standing failure of those held to be deserving; and so becomes the prime target of violence. To those afflicted by the haunting sense of their own limitations, the United States offers temptation and frustration in a blend which can only arouse confusion and anger. Once more, here is an incomplete analysis of reality, another failure of intellect, and it impedes all concerned from meeting on terms of equality, as though time had stood still from the day when those Egyptians had looked into Niebuhr's surveying instrument and found that the landscape was the wrong way up.

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Yearning to be liked

by John Derbyshire

Let me begin with a story, a true story—the story of my one appearance on a lecture stage with Dr. Henry Kissinger. This happened, or rather failed to happen, in the month of September, 2001.

The U.S. State Department runs a Foreign Visitors Program, under whose auspices people from various parts of the world, people distinguished in the arts or professions, are brought to the United States to meet with American counterparts from their own lines of work. I suppose the idea is that mutual understanding will be created thereby, the veil of ignorance lifted, the fetters of ancient prejudice struck off, the dogs of war silenced, and so on. Whether this result is actually attained in many cases, I cannot say. In the particular case I am going to tell you about, it never had a chance to happen.

As a journalist who has been writing about Chinese affairs for nearly twenty years, I am sometimes asked to participate in these functions. The usual course of events is that the State Department will call to tell me that such-and-such a person is being brought over from China under the Foreign Visitors Program, and they think it would be a good idea for me to meet with him or her. They tell me who the person is. If the name is not familiar to me (which, I am sorry to say, is more often the case than not), they give me the visitor's *curriculum vitae*. If I then express interest, a date is set up, almost invariably a lunch date. I hasten to add that this is unpaid work. I do it for the opportunity to meet interesting people, and in the hope that I might get a column out of it.

Well, one day last summer I took a call from my contact—I had done this often enough that we were on first-name terms—at the Foreign Visitors Program. They had a major event coming up, he told me. A large group of Chinese media people, TV producers and the like, were coming over in a single batch. "The cream of 30-40-year-olds at major Chinese media outlets," he gushed. A series of discussion groups and lectures was being arranged. Would I care to address these people? I said I'd like to see names and titles. He e-mailed me a list. Scanning it, I was impressed. These were indeed heavy hitters in Chinese media circles. *News Director, Shanghai Broadcasting Network . . . Deputy Editor-in-Chief, China Newsweek Magazine . . . Editor, International Affairs, Global Times . . . News Anchor, CCTV*. I called the guy back. Yes, definitely I'd be interested.

In the fullness of time, arrangements were made, a program published. There would be an event at the State Department's New York City office on 53nd Street. I would speak for an hour, 10:30 to 11:30, on the subject "Perceptions of China in America's Right-Wing Press." I would then be the guest of the Department for lunch. There would be an honorarium of $250! And the speaker right before me, 9:30 to 10:30,

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would be Dr. Henry Kissinger. The date: Tuesday, September 18th.

On the Friday following the September 11th attacks, I got a call from my man at State. The whole thing was off, he said. Why? I naturally wanted to know. "I can't tell you, *really* can't tell you. Anyway, it's off. We've told Kissinger." Where were the media hotshots? "Gone back, gone back to China, the whole lot. It's all off."

In the weeks that followed I was able to piece together what had happened. This, I should say, was from informal sources, whose versions of events did not always agree in precise detail. All the accounts told the same basic story, though. The Chinese media types came over on September 8th. They were in a room together with some State Department minders, receiving some kind of cultural acclimitization, when the World Trade Center was hit. There was a TV set in the room, and everyone got to see the second plane hit. When this happened, some of the Chinese party stood up and cheered. My informants differ on how many, from a lower bound of "only three or four" up to "at least half a dozen." (The list of participants I had been given contained fifteen names.) This made the State Department minders very angry. A shouting match broke out. A report went up the chain of command. Whether it went all the way to Colin Powell I am not clear; it certainly went as far as Richard Armitage, Powell's second-in-command. The Chinese media people flew back to China shortly afterwards—whether voluntarily or not, my informants do not agree.

There, in the reactions of those successful, well-educated, middle-class Chinese people, you see instinctual Third World anti-Americanism unmasked and unashamed. Where does it come from? What is the cause of it?

It is always tempting, especially for those of us who think too much, to neglect the simplest explanations for things. A great deal of anti-Americanism is sheer ignorance. I recently came upon a survey conducted earlier this year by two scholars at Boston University, Margaret and Melvin DeFleur, called "The Next Generation's Image of Americans: Attitudes and Beliefs Held by Teen-Agers in Twelve Countries." They had questioned one hundred teenagers from each of twelve countries in various parts of the world, to see what kind of image of the United States these young people had. Mostly negative, was the answer, but the report also showed that less than twelve percent had actually visited the U.S. In other words, their images of the United States were secondary ones—from movies, TV programs, and popular music, and through their own countries' educational systems and news outlets.

A great deal of rather obvious blame can be placed there right away. Try to imagine that your own notion of life in the United States was constructed entirely from American movies and TV programs. You would perceive my country as being inhabited by a mix of gigantic, steroid-enhanced basketball stars, exquisitely beautiful young people with perfect teeth and musculature, gangsters, detectives, lawyers, and freakish pop singers. We live in palatial apartments, do very little work, sleep around a lot, and get our way mainly by murdering each other. It is not much of a secret, I think, that a large proportion of American movies are made for export. The people of the Third World watch them with fascination. Unfortunately, fascination is not the same as admiration or fondness. It can coexist very happily with, for example, disgust.

The other factor is the presentation offered to Third Worlders by their own news media, and through their educational system. I can speak with some authority here, having taught English to university students in mainland China, from Chinese texbooks. As it happens, I still have some of those textbooks. Here is one titled simply *English*, by a person named Xu Yanmou, consisting of eighteen extracts from English and American authors, with commentary. The commentary on a Tom Paine extract includes this:

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> Like other Enlightenment thinkers, he [i.e. Tom Paine] labored under the illusion that bourgeois revolution would lead to the establishment of "the kingdom of reason." However, he lived long enough to see this illusion shattered by the reality of the American bourgeois state.

A very common expression in all our textbooks, one the students trotted out frequently in both conversation and examinations, was "The darkness and oppression of bourgeois society." Now on the one hand, you may say that people in that kind of country take the state propaganda with a pinch of salt. You are right, they do. On the other hand, when you are bathed in this stuff all day long, and never hear anything else, from infancy on, a great deal of it is going to stick. The end result is a topcoat of cynicism painted over a foundation of ignorance and misconception. In the spring vacation of that teaching year, I took a trip to Hong Kong for a breath of fresh air. On returning, I tried to discuss Hong Kong with my students. I asked one—a very intelligent young lady, more worldly than most—whether she wouldn't like to go to Hong Kong. "Oh, no!" she replied. "I'm afraid I would end up as the slave of some rich boss!"

It is true that these things happened nearly twenty years ago, and that Chinese people are somewhat more sophisticated now. It is also true, however, that the older members of that delegation Dr. Kissinger and I never had the opportunity to address were coevals of the students I was teaching in 1983. And while the extramural life of young Chinese people is indeed a good deal freer and more colorful now than it was then, the education system is little improved. Staying with my wife's family in North-East China last summer, I had the opportunity to look at some of the school textbooks being used by her 11-year-old nephew. It did not take long for me to find the remembered phrase: "The darkness and oppression of bourgeois society."

One thing you find again and again when you look into anti-Americanism is the conviction that we are a fundamentally immoral nation. I wish I had a dollar for every time I have heard, when living in China, something along the following lines: "People in the West have no deep feelings. They marry and divorce just for fun." I used to counter this, once I got used to it, by pointing out the true fact, perfectly well-known in China, that during the Mao Tse-tung despotism, when a person was branded "counter-revolutionary" and hustled off to a camp, that person's spouse would frequently divorce him or her, sometimes from fear, sometimes on explicit orders from the local Party committee, sometimes in the well-founded conviction that the offender would never be seen again. I am not sure I could construct a logical proof that getting divorced for fun or convenience is morally superior to getting divorced because your Party Secretary tells you to, but I am pretty clear in my mind about which kind of society I would rather live in.

One hears similar things from the Muslim world. The American psychologist Mary Pipher recently wrote about refugees being resettled in the United States in her book *The Middle of Everywhere* (Harcourt, 2002). In a conversation with three of these people, young men from southern Iraq, she learned of the horror Middle Eastern Moslems feel at the way American men treat their women.

> They were outraged at the fact that, in America, young women get pregnant without husbands and that many children don't live with their fathers. . . . Hamid talked of the men at his factory who go to the bars on Staurday night and find women to "do dirty things with." He said: "An Iraqi man would not do that. He would respect women too much. We only want to marry and have families." . . . Mamduh said he encouraged the American men at his job to respect women and to marry.

Human beings will not be denied their consolations; and one of the consolations of

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being poor has always been faith in the fact that while the rich may be more comfortable, they are morally degraded.

> She was poor but she was honest,
> And unsullied was 'er name,
> Till the local squire came courtin'—
> Now the poor girl's lost in shame.
>
> It's the same the 'ole world over,
> It's the poor what gets the blame.
> It's the rich what gets the pleasure,
> Ain't it all a bloomin' shame?

And in fact the poor have a point. Traditionally—I mean, before the invention of the welfare state—the rich *did* misbehave more than the poor, because the relative cost to them of doing so was much less. There is a touching episode in *My Secret Life*, the classic Victorian porno-autobiography (I mention this for the benefit of those who have not read the book, or whose memory of it has been dimmed by time) in which Walter, the pseudonymous first-person narrator, attempts to seduce a young working-class girl by offering her ever-larger sums of money. The girl steadfastly refuses: "It wouldn't be right, Sir"—at any rate up to the point where the sum offered is so tempting, she concedes him one of the minor kinds of relief. Taking his leave, Walter marvels at the power of instilled morality over mere avarice.

Large parts of the world, of course, have no welfare state, and poorer inhabitants of those regions have an attitude to moral laxity, most especially in the sexual sphere, that we would call Victorian. In their minds, the United States is, not to put too fine a point on it, Walter. The wretched of the earth know that they are wretched, while we are not. This is a painful thing for them to know. Their consolation is that they are morally superior to us.

If these beliefs are scarce in the very poorest countries, that is probably because those places have the least exposure to America's own media products. An apparent paradox here, is that it is not the most wretched who hate us the most. The poorest countries in the world, by GDP per head, are places like Ethiopia, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, and Cambodia: not the first names that come to mind when one thinks of anti-Americanism. The threat of Madagascan terrorism is not something that keeps Americans awake at night. I am only pointing out, though, that the sense of moral superiority with which the poor console themselves when contemplating the rich, is a necessary component of anti-Americanism, though plainly not a sufficient one. Show me a Third World anti-American and I will show you a person who believes that our businessmen are flint-faced exploiters, our cities bedlams of vice and crime, and our women sluts.

Is sheer envy of American success a factor? I think it is a very important factor; but "envy" is not quite the right word for what Third World anti-Americans feel.

The processes by which a country becomes successful—economically successful, culturally successful, militarily, intellectually, or politically successful—are very mysterious. Human knowledge does not at present extend very far into these matters. We know a few broad, general things. We know, for example, that it is possible to attain success in one of these dimensions while failing in others. Sparta was militarily successful in the 5th century B.C. but culturally a flop by comparison with Athens. Modern Taiwan is a tremendous economic success; but her culture seems to have little appeal beyond her own shores. . . . And so on. We know that the command economy does not work in an industrial society. We know that sheer size has little to do with success: Switzerland, a small country, is—I think most people would agree—more successful than Brazil, a very large one. Beyond these broad, and mostly negative, generalizations, our knowledge quickly peters out.

Indeed, the very definition of "success" in this context is controversial. The American political scientist Robert Wesson wrote a

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very good survey of the old pre-industrial despotic empires, titled *The Imperial Order*. It covered the Ottomans, the Egyptians, Imperial China, Persia, the Incas, the later Romans, and so on. Wesson's sixth, seventh, and eighth chapter headings are as follows: "Intellectual Failure," "Impoverishment," "Political Failure." Under those headings, Wesson describes how all these old centralized empires quickly succumbed to cultural stagnation, peasant destitution via over-taxation, and the politics of palace intrigue. And yet they all considered themselves very successful; indeed, some of their descendants today persist in seeing them as such. Ask a Chinese person which was more successful: his own country during the Ming Dynasty or Tudor England. Then ask me the same question. Success, so far as nations are concerned, is to some degree in the eye of the beholder.

Its causes are at any rate beyond the reach of our present understanding. Now, the human mind abhors a vacuum. We must have explanations; and when methodical, scientific inquiry fails to explain, or is not yet part of our intellectual repertoire, we fill the gap with conjecture. The sky is a crystal sphere; earthquakes are the wrath of Poseidon; disease is caused by an imbalance of "humors." So it is with the success of nations. My country is rich and strong while yours is not? Why, my people must be genetically superior to your people! Your country is rich and strong while mine is not? That is because your ancestors colonized us and stole our natural resources! We are all familiar with these, and many other, vulgar theories attempting to account for the rise and fall of nations. Most of them give off a distinct whiff of pseudoscience.

Pseudoscience, of course, overlaps with religion. Probably the most popular explanation for the success of nations—reflected in the patriotic songs of the United States herself—is divine favor. This ought to mean that a nation that is very obviously top dog, as the U.S. currently is, will be held in respectful awe, as being especially favored by Heaven. Unfortunately, human nature does not operate so straightforwardly.

To see how it *does* operate, consider the cargo cults that came up in Melanesia during the middle decades of the twentieth century. The native peoples of Papua New Guinea, the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), and some other places in the South-West Pacific observed airstrips being built on their islands by white men. Then they saw planes flying in and discharging cargo. Succumbing to the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, they assumed that the building of airstrips, control towers, and the like was a thing the gods regarded with approval, and rewarded by sending planes full of cargo. These native peoples thereupon hacked rough airstrips out of the bush, and built flimsy structures of bamboo and thatch in the shape of control towers. Then they waited for the cargo to arrive.

When the cargo did not arrive, the cargo cultists were obliged to come up with some explanation for the failure of their system. No problem! Explaining the failure of philosophical systems is a thing that human beings, at every cultural level, are quite extraordinarily good at. The Melanesians came to the conclusion that it was all the fault of the white men, who, in their malice, and by dint of superior magic, had diverted cargo meant for the natives to their own airstrips.

I frequently detect an element of cargo-cultism when traveling in the Third World. *The Americans have skyscrapers! America is rich and strong! If we build skyscrapers, soon we shall be rich and strong!* Hence, the cities of the Third World are thick with skyscrapers. Little noticed, and even less understood, is the fact that America's wealth and strength pre-dated America's skyscrapers, and in fact had its origins in political and cultural characteristics, of which skyscrapers are merely an occasional and adventitious expression.

Some of those Third World skyscrapers, to be sure, are very busy, and their nations are improving. I have been inside some

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others, though, where the under-employed workers drowse at their desks, my footsteps sound loud in the empty corridors, and long-exposed duct-work or wiring, thick with dust, shows where the state funding ran out. In these places, the cargo does not come, and the natives turn their gaze toward America, cargo capital of the world, in anger and resentment.

There are, finally, some particular, local reasons why people hate America—some specific grievances. The most famous of these is that we support Israel, a nation which all Arabs, and a large proportion of non-Arab Muslims, consider to be illegitimate. I have no time here to enlarge on the pros and cons of the Arab-Israel dispute. I do note, however, a point made rather strongly in that Boston University study I mentioned earlier:

> The collective condemnations expressed by a people when a negative incident occurs do not come out of nowhere. As a general principle, a negative incident can become a *cause célèbre*, rallying widespread anger, only if a necessary condition is met. That condition is this: *There must already be in place a foundation of shared negative beliefs and attitudes toward the United States upon which the feelings generated by the specific incident can be based.* (Italics in original.)

By way of illustration, the researchers note that the only one of the countries surveyed to show generally positive attitudes toward the U.S. was Argentina. This was in spite of the help we gave to Britain in the Falklands War of 1982. Contrariwise, some of the strongest anti-American attitudes were found in South Korea, a nation that, but for the sacrifice of 27,000 American lives, would now be enduring despotism, famine, and extreme poverty. In this regard, apparently, not only does no good deed go unpunished, but no hostile deed goes unrewarded. Similarly, and even more curiously, the study notes stronger anti-American attitudes in Taiwan, a nation that owes its continued existence to American power, than in mainland China, whose state media have been putting out a steady diet of anti-American propaganda for fifty years.

I am afraid I have not drawn a very hopeful picture of Third World anti-Americanism. Supposing that I am right, the phenomenon is rooted in the little-understood processes by which some nations succeed while others fail and in the invariants of human nature. We should of course—and I think we do—try to help other nations to succeed, by encouraging them to adopt rational economic and political systems. That, however, is a slow and uncertain process. Meanwhile, human nature remains as Kant found it: crooked timber, out of which nothing straight can be made. Probably anti-Americanism will be with us for a long time yet.

This is a shame, because the one thing everyone notices about us Americans is how much we want to be liked. That, at any rate, *used* to be the thing everyone noticed. I do not think the yearning to be liked has departed from the American psyche yet, but it now finds itself sharing that psyche with some other wishes: principally, the desire that if we cannot be liked, we shall at least be respected. If it should become clear that Americans are to be denied even respect, I think quite a lot of us will settle for being feared. We are not much given to Latin tags nowadays, but there is one that keeps popping up in American newspapers and web sites, and which just this last week I actually saw printed on a T-shirt. The tag is the one Seneca denounced as a "vile, detestable and deadly sentiment," but which had a steady currency throughout the late-Republican, early-Imperial period of Roman rule: *Oderint dum metuant*—"Let them hate us, so long as they fear us." I am with Seneca on this one; I hope things never come to that; but I am bound to say, from talking with and listening to my fellow Americans, that is the direction in which they are heading.

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Dubious moralisms

by Michael Mosbacher & Digby Anderson

The democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were heralded as marking the unambiguous triumph of both the capitalist system and bourgeois liberal democracy. Francis Fukuyama famously argued that the battle of ideologies was over. The age of radical protest, and its corollary of radical, politically motivated anti-Americanism, seemed to be at an end.

Yet by the end of the 1990s a new and voluble protest movement had emerged. These new protesters have been variously styled, both by outside commentators and themselves, as the anti-globalization, anti-corporate, or anti-capitalist movement. It entered mass public consciousness through the huge coverage of what has become known to the protest community as "the Battle for Seattle," the large and sometimes violent protests against the World Trade Organization's summit in late 1999. These scenes reminded television viewers of nothing so much as the anti-Vietnam demonstrations of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Such set piece demonstrations have become the norm at international summits. As pointed out in *Marketing The Revolution: The New Anti-Capitalism and The Attack upon Corporate Brands*,[1] these campaigns have been shown to have a popular appeal. This is evidenced in the United States and Britain by the great commercial success of recent books, such as Thomas Frank's *One Market under God*, Kalle Lasn's *Culture Jam*, and Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, that decry U.S. capitalism and describe and extol the new protest movement. The latter entered Britain's top ten bestsellers list for many weeks and became the bestselling U.K. business book for many months, a remarkable achievement for an anti-corporate radical political tract. John Pilger and especially Noam Chomsky, from an older generation of radical, more explicitly anti-American authors, have acted as cheerleaders and gurus for this movement.

Do the new protesters share the anti-Americanism of their forebears? Does the popularity of their campaigns represent a resurgence in anti-Americanism? Unlike earlier ones, today's protests are not usually explicitly about U.S. defense or foreign policy. Instead, often via websites cleverly parodying the company's own, protesters seek to highlight alleged abuses by specific corporations. They accuse company X of polluting the environment, company Y of manufacturing its goods in sweatshop conditions in developing countries, and company Z of employing children to harvest its raw materials. Such campaigns are not obviously anti-American. A closer examination, however, reveals strong underlying anti-American sympathies.

1 *Marketing The Revolution: The New Anti-Capitalism and The Attack upon Corporate Brands*, by Michael Mosbacher; Social Affairs Unit, £9.95.

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The new protest movement is heterodox and diverse. Some of its members would describe themselves as anarchists, others as every conceivable shade of green, a few as Marxist; the majority would, however, simply say that they were anti-corporate. It seems to have become *de rigueur* for those speaking on behalf of such protests to say that they are not even sure if they are anti-capitalist. The movement has no clear image of where it might wish to go, except away from where we are. A certain core set of viewpoints is, however, shared by the protesters. Taking their four core claims in turn shows how anti-American assumptions still underpin radical protest.

The first of these claims is that corporations are becoming ever more powerful and that governments have been captured by corporate interests. It is claimed, without and indeed counter to the evidence, that even the most powerful Western governments have lost their ability to regulate corporations and now simply do the bidding of large multinational corporations. The prime example of this is seen as the United States. Since the election of George W. Bush, this claim has grown in resonance, although Bill Clinton was also portrayed, perhaps most notably by Ralph Nader, as seeking to boost corporate interests at both the expense of ordinary Americans and the rest of the world. Typical villains are the U.S. oil companies, especially ExxonMobil. Bush's proposal to open up parts of the Arctic National Wilderness Reserve for oil exploration and his opposition to the Kyoto climate change proposals were simply explained in terms of corporate greed and political patronage. No explanation for such policies is entertained other than invidious corporate power. It is not countenanced that someone might support such policies for any other reason. Ideological support for the market economy is portrayed as a mere chimera constructed by corporate interests. The United States is portrayed as the industrialized country in which corporate power has reached its apotheosis. Many European social democrats writing from a more moderate perspective than that of the protesters share this deep antagonism to what they perceive as a U.S. model of capitalism. They often set up U.S. society in general, and U.S. capitalism in particular, as a dystopia which must be avoided and contrast it with their preferred model of European welfare societies and regulated capitalism. Will Hutton, the former editor of the U.K. Sunday paper *The Observer* and a frequently quoted commentator, is perhaps the best British example of this, but he is by no means alone.

Furthermore U.S. corporations are accused by the protesters of spreading their malign influence to other countries and being responsible for a seeping rise of global multinational corporate power. They are portrayed as the source of corruption. It is worth noting how often the most targeted and maligned corporations, those accused of having the most insidious influence, are American: Monsanto, McDonald's, Nike, Wal-Mart, Citigroup, the aforementioned ExxonMobil.

The second of the protesters' claims is that trade is impoverishing the multitudinous poor of the global South while enriching a small wealthy minority in the North. That this claim flies in the face of evidence that trade is not only the source of mass affluence in the North but also the only route out of poverty for the South does not discourage the protesters. The fact that this evidence is accepted all but universally by economists and also by nearly all governments regardless of the previous ideological adherences of their members simply reinforces the protesters' prejudices. Although Gramsci is not often cited in their literature (there is not much theory of any sort to be found in their literature), the protesters perceive the widespread acknowledgment of the benefits of free trade as an example of quasi-Gramscian hegemonic myth-making. For them belief in free trade is not a valid view with which they happen to disagree. They perceive what they see as "the neo-liberal hegemony" as an ideologi-

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cal construction merely serving the interests of the powerful. This is where the anti-Americanism of this claim comes out most strongly. "The neo-liberal hegemony" of the activists' imagination has been constructed consciously and unconsciously in the economics departments of U.S. universities; the "Chicago School" has become shorthand for all the protesters despise. It is enforced by what they perceive as the U.S. dominated IMF, World Bank, and World Trade Organization. The protesters conveniently forget that the United States only has one voice among many in the WTO. Those countries that will not adopt free trade policies are forced to do so, or so the argument goes, by U.S. economic might and the organizations that they dominate. An argument about the merits of free trade thus for the protesters becomes a critique of American power; it becomes something to attack the United States with.

The third claim is that a uniform branded corporate culture is gaining global dominance and that it is submerging local identities. This is the claim in which anti-Americanism comes expressly to the surface. The global brands that are attacked are virtually all American: Coca-Cola, MTV, Levi's, Starbucks, again McDonald's and Nike. The protesters hate these brands because many of them are claiming a territory, youth culture, which the protesters see as their own. It is not the lifestyle the brands seek to associate themselves with which they hate, but the commercial exploitation of that culture. The protesters perceive the commercialized culture of the brands, with which they closely identify the United States, as a pollutant, a contagion that will soil all it touches. The fear of U.S. commercial culture is, of course, a far from new one.

Those protesters who claim to be defending local customs and producers against the might of U.S. brands seem to have little confidence in the resilience of what they are defending. Perhaps the classic example this is the French farmer-activist José Bové. One of his most notable actions was the symbolic smashing up of a new branch of McDonald's for their perceived threat to French food producers. This seems to suggest a remarkable lack of confidence in French consumers.

The fourth claim is that views that are contrary to the interests of big corporations cannot be heard; it is that events and news that highlight the iniquity of international capital are stymied, underreported, or censored. The protesters do not seem to have been shaken in their belief in this claim by the fact that the previously mentioned anti-corporate tracts were published, and much hyped, by major commercial international publishers and that voices highly critical of corporations do not exactly seem to be excluded from the mainstream media.

Obviously many of the media outlets attacked for their alleged censorship are American. Perhaps, however, the more interesting aspect of this claim in the context of anti-Americanism is its U.S. origins. Undoubtedly the writer who has had the most influence on today's protesters is the American Noam Chomsky. This claim is drawn directly from writings of Chomsky, such as *Manufacturing Consent*. He has become something of a guru to the protesters and indeed has gained a wider appeal—parroting Chomsky has become *de rigueur* for self-styled "free thinkers." The U.S. origins of this claim are symptomatic of the broader U.S. roots of today's protest movement: the movement entered international consciousness through the events in Seattle, its leading sympathetic chroniclers—Frank, Lasn, and Klein—are North American, and its targets remain American.

It remains to be seen what the long-term effects on the protest movement of the terrorist attacks of September 11, and more importantly the U.S. response to them, will be. Will today's protesters emulate their predecessors and turn U.S. foreign policy into their leading bête noire, the object of their attacks? Attacks upon the U.S. response to September 11 can be loudly heard among the protesters. Rallies are again being held

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in the name of "stopping the war." Dubious moral equivalences so popular among earlier generations of protesters are once again being made. The terrorist attacks upon the United States are somehow equated with the U.S. military response. To quote Noam Chomsky, "The new millennium has begun with two monstrous crimes: the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the reaction to them, surely taking a far greater toll of innocent lives." This type of argument will be familiar to many. At present, however, these direct attacks on U.S. foreign policy remain a secondary target for the protesters. Their main targets remain the broader anti-corporate, anti-globalization ones.

What (to quote a well-known troublemaker) is to be done? If we analyze this account of the anti-globalization/anti-American protesters argument, we can quickly see several things. First, it is not a coherent argument. In fact there are strands in it that do not fit with other strands. The policies necessary to satisfy the extreme environmentalists will not satisfy those looking to expand the wealth of countries in the South. Further to this point, it contains awkward political bedfellows. The arguments of some deep ecology advocates are quasi-fascist, yet some of the protesters are quasi-Marxists. Next, it is not, compared to, for instance, Marxism, a very logical argument; it relies on appeals to sentiment. Third, again unlike Marxism, it is purely negative; it is not constructive. Fourth, it is Gramscian in its assumption that what its enemies believe is only believed because it serves their interests. Fifthly, the protesters are themselves significantly an Anglo-American/first-world movement. Sixthly, partly because it is sentimentalist, it resorts to various rhetorical devices. Those who want to get wider appeal for abstract arguments try to concretize them, that is, to link them to persons (even personalities—thus anti-Reaganism, anti-Thatcherism, and, in today's debate, anti-McDonaldization). One way to personalize is through geography. Thus we talk of "Spartan efforts," "Delphic wisdom," and "Germanic phraseology." Thus, to an extent, the anti-Americanism in the protesters' arguments may be a rhetorical device. We emphasize "to an extent." Even this usage is not to be ignored because any argument, to be effective against the protesters, should think of doing the same thing, that is, finding concrete people and places to dramatize abstract arguments about, e.g., the benefits of free trade. Anyway, purely logical arguments are not going to cut much ice against an essentially sentimental appeal. What that needs is counter-sentiment. The incoherent aspect of the protesters' case does offer obvious opportunities to set the incoherent parties against each other and expose the odd bedfellows. The lack of a constructive element also offers obvious argumentative challenges. Even more does the Gramscian ploy. Two can play that game. Whose interests are the protest lobby serving? Most of all the first-world origin of the protesters' case is an opportunity. They argue that the crushing of non-Western cultures by American corporate culture is a form of imperialism. What is their own movement but an attempt by first world ideology trippers to indulge themselves at the expense of the poor of the South? Those of us who are concerned with these problems should address the construction of emotion tugging, concretized, enemy-dividing arguments against the protesters' case. We might also care to work on the Gramscian ploy. But the resistance to the protesters' cultural imperialism would be much better coming from one of its victims. It is crucial that those countries whose people's progress is being threatened by the protesters' agenda should make that counter-protest themselves. They may need some encouragement.

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Johnson, Boswell & the biographer's quest

by Jeffrey Meyers

Samuel Johnson noted the fascination of gossip, "the delight the mind feels in the investigation of secrets," and famously declared: "the biographical part of literature is what I love best." His penetrating intuition and insight into the lives of his subjects, his formidable knowledge and narrative skill, and his innovative ideas about biography make the *Lives of the Poets* (1779–81) valuable, indeed essential, models for the modern biographer. Personally acquainted with only a few of his subjects, like Savage and Collins, Johnson believed in finding the facts. He sought out records and documents, letters and manuscripts, printed works and memoirs, interviews and anecdotes. He described the poets' intellectual backgrounds and educations, mainly at Oxford and Cambridge. He placed them in the political contexts of their time, analyzing their views in relation to Cromwell's Interregnum and the Restoration of Charles II, the domination of the Tories under Queen Anne and of the Whigs under the Hanoverians. Johnson was the originator of literary biography, and Boswell put Johnson's principles into practice in his *Life of Johnson*. The conjunction of these two extraordinary personalities gave modern biography its first impetus and determined the course it would take for the next two centuries.

Johnson began his life of Cowley (the first in the book) with a plea for a detailed, rather than indistinct, life; for history, not funeral oration; for truth, not panegyric. But he recognized that telling all was risky and said: "the necessity of complying with times, and of sparing persons, is the great impediment of biography." Both Johnson and (with more difficulty) Boswell followed the ideal of judicious restraint, the scrupulous adherence to the truth of available evidence. Both sensitively refrained from publishing controversial material that might give pain to living people. And Boswell, for all his bumbling egoism, even held back authentic information that was flattering to himself.

The *Lives of the Poets* originally appeared as *Prefaces Biographical and Critical* to the works of the English poets. The publishers who commissioned this ambitious and influential work, Johnson's masterpiece, restricted him to poets after 1660. Although many of the fifty-two poets are now forgotten, they had all enjoyed significant reputations when alive. Johnson was not always conscientious about assembling and checking the accuracy of the requisite information. He complained to Hester Thrale that the monumental scope of the *Lives* compelled him to have "something to say about Men of whom I know nothing but their verses, and sometimes very little of them."

In a noble passage in the life of Addison, he contrasted the apparent permanence of history to the evanescence of biography, which depended on fallible memory: "History may be formed from permanent

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monuments and records; but Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost for ever. What is known can seldom be immediately told; and when it might be told, it is no longer known. The delicate features of the mind, the nice discriminations of character, and the minute peculiarities of conduct, are soon obliterated." The biographer has to capture a life before it disappears. In some cases, when revolutionaries try to destroy the past, the need for preservation is urgent. In Cromwell's time, Johnson gravely noted, "it was seriously proposed that all the records in the Tower should be burnt, that all memory of things past should be effaced, and that the whole system of life should commence anew."

When Boswell, more assiduous in pursuit of the live Johnson than Johnson was of the dead poets, offered to introduce him to Pope's friend Lord Marchmont, Johnson refused the bait and petulantly replied: "'I don't care to know about Pope.' Mrs Thrale [exclaimed] 'I suppose, Sir, Mr. Boswell thought, that as you are to write *Pope's Life*, you would wish to know about him.' Johnson. 'Wish! why yes. If it rained knowledge I'd hold out my hand; but I would not give myself the trouble to go in quest of it.'" Still, when it was time to write Pope's life, Johnson roused himself, called on Lord Marchmont, and learned all he could from him. Congenitally lazy, but with spurts of industry, Johnson, in a sentence that slyly suggests his stop-and-go efforts, recorded: "I finished the lives of the Poets, which I wrote in my usual way, dilatorily and hastily, unwilling to work, and working with vigour, and haste."

In the life of Cowley, Johnson raised a major question that his biographies tried to answer: what is genius and where does it come from? He was also deeply concerned with the delineation and development of character, and in making authoritative critical judgments. Johnson was especially good on three subjects of riveting interest: sex, insanity, and death. His discussion of sexual life, especially in the immoral Restoration, was, rather surprisingly, witty, racy, even sensational.

Davenant's syphilitically ravaged nose, which "had suffered such diminution by mishaps among women," had to be concealed by a tell-tale patch. The Duke of Buckingham, one of Rochester's corrupt companions, was about to be introduced to Samuel Butler, whom he had agreed to recommend for royal favor. But, "observing a pimp of his acquaintance . . . trip by with a brace of ladies, [he] immediately quitted his engagement, to follow another kind of business." Johnson, offering a royal anecdote, imitated King James's Scottish accent: "a certain lord coming in soon after, his Majesty cried out, 'Oh, my lord, they say you lig with my lady.' 'No, Sir,' says his lordship, in confusion; 'but I like her company because she has so much wit.' 'Why then,' says the King, 'do you not lig with my lord of Winchester?'" All these anecdotes, despite their sexual content, had a moral undertone: the terrible consequences of immorality, the crass indifference of the great, a dissolute court and cuckolded king.

Johnson was terrified of insanity, and actually purchased chains and manacles in case he went violently out of his mind and had to be forcibly restrained. Madness in others always elicited his sympathy. He wrote that Denham's second marriage "disordered his understanding" and he was "lampooned for his lunacy." But "his frenzy lasted not long; and he seems to have regained his full force of mind." Johnson knew "poor Collins" and was deeply concerned with his tragic fate. He observed, while tenderly describing the inexorable progress of his mental illness, that Collins "languished some years under that depression of mind which enchains the faculties without destroying them, and leaves reason the knowledge of right without the power of pursuing it. . . . He was for some time confined in a house of lunatics" until death came to his relief.

Johnson feared death and eternal damnation as much as he feared madness. He

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wrote that Pope's death was ludicrously hastened, if not caused, by his overfondness for rich and exotic dishes, and by "a silver saucepan, in which it was his delight to heat potted lampreys." Milton was blessed with a peaceful end.

His "gout, with which he had been long tormented, prevailed over the enfeebled powers of nature [and] he died, by a quiet and silent expiration." Otway's death—incited by "indigence, and its concomitants, sorrow and despondency"—was so dreadful that Johnson was at first unwilling to mention it. The vivid details—"hunted . . . by the terriers of the law," "almost naked in the rage of hunger"; the desperate wandering in search of succor; the unexpected generosity of a stranger; the supposed extinction of hunger by gnawing on a roll; and the sudden, ironic death when he choked on it—all make this scene one of the most moving and memorable in the *Lives*.

Johnson's *chef d'oeuvre*, inspired by his knowledge of and attachment to the subject, was his life of Richard Savage. He wrote it at top speed, completing forty-eight printed octavo pages at a single sitting. First published in 1744, it was included thirty-five years later in the *Lives of the Poets*. The touchy and aggressive Savage, a dozen years older than Johnson, was a professional bastard, spendthrift and sponger, street bum and jailbird, struggling writer, pardoned murderer—and intimate friend. Johnson structured the Life by a series of extreme contrasts: high birth and illegitimacy, nobility and degradation, wealth and poverty, fame and obscurity, sobriety and drunkenness, calm and violence, freedom and bondage.

Savage is the archetypal scorned and accursed poet, and some of Johnson's comments apply equally to himself. Like Johnson, Savage (who often had no place to go) would never be "the first of the company that desired to separate. . . . He could neither be persuaded to go to bed in the night, nor to rise in the day." And like Johnson, who threw a gift of shoes down his staircase in Oxford, Savage was deeply offended when a friend discreetly left clothes for him at a coffee-house. Johnson described Savage's life with great sympathy, for he had endured many of the same hardships. But, unlike Savage, he always had a place to sleep and never actually starved. After the struggles described in his poem "London," he had climbed out of poverty and was on his way up.

Johnson, who always had great difficulty in getting himself to write, was intensely interested in the various ways that authors composed their works. The blind Milton, "when he had composed as many lines as his memory would conveniently retain," would call for an amanuensis. Pope roused his weary servant four times during a fierce winter night "to supply him with paper lest he should lose a thought." But Savage's mode of composition was unique. Deprived not only of room and fuel but also of writing implements, "he used to walk and form his speeches, and afterwards step into a shop, beg for a few moments the use of the pen and ink, and write down what he had composed upon paper he had picked up by accident." When Savage lacked the few pence to pay for the meanest lodging among the most profligate "riot and filth," he "walked about the streets till he was weary, and lay down in the summer upon a bulk, or in winter, with his associates in poverty, among the ashes of a glass-house." The frozen poet warming himself in hot ashes is as dreadful as it is ingenious.

Johnson gives a moving account of Savage's death at the age of forty-six in the grim precincts of a Bristol prison. Seeing the keeper at his bedside, he "said with uncommon earnestness, 'I have something to say to you, Sir,' but, after a pause, moved his hand in a melancholy manner, and finding himself unable to recollect what he was going to communicate, said, '"Tis gone!'" Leaving his very last thought unexpressed, Savage announced his own demise with "'Tis gone!" just as the butterfly gesture of his hand subtly suggested the departure of

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his soul. The life of Savage is a memorial and elegy as well as a biography.

"Impregnated with the Johnsonian ether," Boswell persuaded the master to let him write his life. Closer in mental outlook to the modern biographer, he developed, refined, and perfected Johnson's methods. He did exhaustive research, gained access to private papers, and struggled to maintain the perilous balance between concealment and revelation. Johnson, enjoying this struggle, teased Boswell and (though bear-like himself) led his disciple along like a bear on a chain. He never, for example, told Boswell why he collected orange peel—which, I believe, he dried out and used to start fires. But Boswell deliberately provoked Johnson's attacks in order to create memorable scenes. Irritated by Boswell's endless inquiries, he exploded with: "I will not be put to the *question*. Don't you consider, Sir, that these are not the manners of a gentleman? I will not be baited with *what*, and *why*; what is this? what is that? why is a cow's tail long? why is a fox's tail bushy? . . . . You have but two topicks, yourself and me. I am sick of both."

Boswell continued to ask provocative questions, assiduously (and sometimes tactlessly) collected information, and took indiscreet notes immediately after conversations and interviews. Competing with rival biographers and well aware of the accident of evidence, he was always keen to preserve the revealing anecdote and to paint his authentic "Flemish" picture. (Imagine how our view of Shakespeare would be changed if one personal comment about his mother had survived; or if we had one letter by Marlowe to illuminate his homosexuality, atheism, or role as a secret agent.) Boswell's fanatical devotion to his quarry, compulsive search for original documents, attention to minute detail, dramatization of crucial scenes, and denigration of competitors all established the techniques and form of modern biography.

Boswell preserved Johnson's "minute particularities of conduct." His best scenes portray Johnson's eating habits, tendency to violence, sexual life, public penance, drastic surgery, and frightening stroke. Using Johnson's gross appetite as a lure, John Wilkes—anathema to Johnson for his personal immorality and radical politics—set out to charm him by playing the attentive servant:

> Mr. Wilkes was very assiduous in helping him to some fine veal. "Pray give me leave, Sir:—It is better here—A little of the brown—Some fat, Sir—A little of the stuffing—Some gravy—Let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter—Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange;—or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest." "Sir, Sir, I am obliged to you, Sir," cried Johnson, bowing and turning his head to him with a look for some time of "surly virtue," but, in a short while, of complacency.

Boswell brought this comic scene to life by describing Wilkes cunningly creeping up on his prey and playing on the great man's weakness; by the delicious details and ingratiating tone; by transforming Johnson, fattened by food and flattery, from surly to pleasant. Johnson, of course, saw through Wilkes's deception but *enjoyed* being seduced by the villain.

We admire Johnson, as we admire Hemingway, for his masculinity: his physical prowess and considerable courage. Two stories suggest it was unwise to mess around with him. He once knocked down the bookseller Osborne with, appropriately enough, a folio volume (a duodecimo would not do) and finished the undoubtedly well earned punishment by putting his foot on Osborne's neck. He forcefully summarized the incident by exclaiming: "Sir, he was impertinent to me, and I beat him." During his youth, at the playhouse in Lichfield, "Johnson, having for a moment quitted a chair which was placed for him between the side-scenes, a gentleman took possession of it, and when Johnson on his return civilly demanded his seat, rudely

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refused to give it up; upon which Johnson laid hold of it, and tossed him and the chair into the pit." In this marvelous account, Johnson, *civilly* demanding the seat reserved for him close to the stage (he couldn't see from far away), was greeted with a *rude* refusal. Since his adversary was clearly unreceptive to rational discourse, Johnson finally settled the dispute by taking possession of *him*, and by throwing both the suddenly *déclassé* gentleman and his chair into the mob in the pit.

The clap-ridden Boswell, an expert on sex, boldly intruded on Johnson's "domestick privacies" with some surprising revelations about his sexual appetite, which was as strong as his appetite for food. When Johnson, recently married to a widow, taught Davy Garrick and other schoolboys, "the young rogues used to listen at the door of his bed-chamber, and peep through the key-hole, that they might turn into ridicule his tumultuous and awkward fondness for Mrs. Johnson." Since Johnson was physically weird and the big-bosomed Tetty was twenty years older, their situation was inherently comical. But the comedy was intensified as the voyeuristic scholars watched his inevitably awkward performance, through the keyhole, as if it were a silent movie.

Johnson, whose "amorous inclinations were uncommonly strong and impetuous," found he could not resist the temptations of the half-naked and all-too-willing actresses in the Green Room. In Garrick's theater, Johnson, overwhelmed by the alluring assault of pneumatic breasts and fetishistic silk, declared: "I'll come no more behind your scenes, David; for the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses excite my amorous propensities." Boswell recorded but didn't publish another even more revealing story of Johnson (whose fondness extended beyond his wife) surprised by sin and barely resisting sexual temptation. Elizabeth Desmoulins, who had lived with Johnson and Tetty and after Tetty's death became a permanent member of his household, told Boswell "how she would join the [temporarily] spurned husband in his bedroom, laying her head on his pillow, and allowing him to kiss and fondle her until he was obviously excited. Then he would cry 'Get you gone.'"

Unlike almost all other writers whose lives have been subjected to intense scrutiny, Johnson's noble character—his courage, integrity and moral force—shines forth in Boswell's book. Two late anecdotes reveal his moral as well as his physical courage. An apparently trivial but irreverent act early in life gnawed at his conscience and led to a strange but moving penance when he was in his early seventies:

> Once, indeed, I was disobedient; I refused to attend my father to Uttoxeter-market. Pride was the source of that refusal, and the remembrance of it was painful. A few years ago, I desired to atone for this fault; I went to Uttoxeter in very bad weather, and stood for a considerable time bareheaded in the rain, on the spot where my father's stall used to stand. In contrition I stood, and I hope the penance was expiatory.

Boswell portrays Johnson as a latter-day St. Simon Stylites, standing bareheaded in the downpour on the guilty spot (which he remembered fifty years later) as the astonished townsmen glanced at the madman and hurried on to find shelter.

In the last month of his life Johnson suffered from dropsy. Without anesthesia to assuage the agonizing pain, he made extraordinary—and repeated—efforts to ease his torment and preserve his life. Seizing the surgical knife, he plunged it into his bloated leg and watched the bloody liquid gush out: "imagining that the dropsical collection of water which oppressed him might be drawn off by making incisions in his body, he, with his usual resolute defiance of pain, cut deep, when he thought the surgeon had done it too tenderly."

Finally, distancing himself from himself in the moment of crisis, Johnson gave his own remarkably objective account of the

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minor stroke he suffered shortly before his death. In this episode, his fear of losing his mind was even greater than his fear of dissolution. But only Johnson, *in extremis*, could have had the moral strength to compose a prayer and then make a critical judgment about its inadequacy:

> I felt a confusion and indistinctness in my head, which lasted, I suppose, about half a minute. I was alarmed, and prayed God, that however he might afflict my body, he would spare my understanding. This prayer, that I might try the integrity of my faculties, I made in Latin verse. The lines were not very good, but I knew them not to be very good, and concluded myself to be unimpaired in my faculties.

The zealous modern biographer tries to match Boswell's persistence in finding everything he wants to know. As an irritated old lady once told me, "Young man, you have a one-track mind!" Henry James's brilliant story *The Aspern Papers* (1888) is the classic satire on the biographer's quest. His hero is willing to intrude on an unworldly household in a crumbling Venetian palazzo, falsify his identity and ingratiate himself, deceive and betray the trust of two innocent ladies, court and marry the shy young spinster, steal, and perhaps even murder. He'll do anything to get his hands on the portrait and the papers of the great poet Jeffrey Aspern in order to reveal a romantic connection to the old lady. When she catches him rifling through her bureau in the dead of night, she calls him a "publishing scoundrel"—the perfect definition of a biographer.

We've now come a long way from Johnson in style and scope. We are more likely than Johnson to use original research that casts new light on the subject. In his biographies Johnson tended to separate the life from the poetry; today we strive to integrate them: to analyze the life in order to illuminate the works. Under the influence of the techniques and concerns of the novel, we are more interested than he was in evolution and development, in the numerous selves and multiple lives of the subject. As Henry James observed: "To live over people's lives is nothing unless we live over their perceptions, live over the growth, the change, the varying intensity of the same—since it was *by* these things they themselves lived."

Johnson and Boswell have molded our ideas about biography and created the forms that embody its essential qualities. It should have a thorough mastery of the material; a complete and accurate account of the private as well as the public life: friendships, conversation, dress, habits, tastes, food and money. It should have a dramatic flair and lively narrative style; convincingly delineate character; portray the social and political background; and locate the structure and pattern in the life. It should be selective rather than exhaustive, analytical rather than descriptive; emphasize not the events of the life, but what they *mean*, and do justice to the subject by evaluating the achievement.

Johnson assumed that the purpose of biography was not simply to tell one man's story, but to make sense of life. He was the first to define biography as an attempt to understand the lives of others, as "an act of the imagination." Ideally, all literary biographers should be like him: with a vast knowledge, probing intelligence, fine critical judgment, and healthy scepticism tempered by common sense. Perhaps no writer today could equal Johnson's learning or Boswell's intimate knowledge of his subject, but the modern biographer, an investigative reporter of the spirit, still strives for their sympathy and intuition.

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New Poems
by Harvey Shapiro & Valerie Wohlfeld

Nights

Drunk and weeping. It's another night
at the live-in opera, and I figure
it's going to turn out badly for me.
The dead next door accept their salutations,
their salted notes, the drawn-out wailing.
It's we the living who must run for cover,
meaning me. Mortality's the ABC of it,
and after that comes lechery and lying.
And, oh, how to piece together a life
from this scandal and confusion, as if
the gods were inhabiting us, or cohabiting
with us, just for the music's sake.

—*Harvey Shapiro*

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Vessel

To be colored in metallic salt,
dipped in cobalt
blue, raku's
flame-tamed hue's
equatorial smoke and wintry water.

To reside in luster:
illicit god's chamber-
quarantined gold.
To be the stone—small, in blindfold,
pressed to the vessel's

burnished sides. To be the pestle's
love against the mortar:
plot of glaze, guise of feldspar.
To be the shard-skin:
glass cast-out of manganese, iron, livid tin.

To be the callow body
vitrified in journey
near catastrophe:
something new arises out of desire
of water, earth and furtive-fettered fire.

—*Valerie Wohlfeld*

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Erebus

"The region of the underworld through which the dead must pass"

I dreamt I sung out of a mouth of tin
and death kissed my mouth of tin
with death's own mouth which was as verdigris,
as soft solder on my tongue, as a foundry
of Egyptian bronzes smelt of copper and tin:

closed eye to closed eye—
rising sigh to rising sigh—
stilled thigh against stilled thigh—
voice to crystalline
voice as unsilenced lazuli

and jade in their sarcophagi—
lullaby untying lullaby
in syllables of sleep—spy
seduced by cunning spy in conspiracy
of kisses: twin mouth to twin
mouth, death sung out my mouth of tin.

—*Valerie Wohlfeld*

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Theater

"Out" at the old ballgame

by Mark Steyn

On the face of it, the lack of great sporting plays is a mystery. Sport and theater have so much in common, beginning with the division of the drama into acts. But successful sports plays are few and far between and, once you take out the likes of *Golden Boy*, successful team sports plays are even fewer. Even baseball, loaded with so many national myths, has been traditionally a box-office bust: When *Damn Yankees* opened on Broadway in 1955, the producers took a picture of Gwen Verdon in cap, glove, and striped shirt, with her bottom peeking out very fetchingly from underneath. They stuck it on the posters, and no one came. So they threw the old posters out and put up some new ones with Gwen in a revealing basque. Everyone came. Hal Prince, the producer, concluded that theater audiences had no interest in baseball, and therefore, if you had a show about baseball, the best thing to do was obscure the fact. Even those with a foot in both camps—Ring Lardner, for example, man about Broadway and a fine baseball writer—seemed to have an instinctive understanding that the different streams of the American vernacular don't always merge well.

But every so often someone tries again, and so we have *Take Me Out*, a new play whose title derives from its modish hook: a big-league player who declares his gayness. He does this right at the beginning of the show, at a press conference, thereby pitching us into what Kippy, his teammate, calls "the mess." For the next three hours and three acts, we are immersed in the problems of the New York Empires, a major-league team not dissimilar to a certain other New York team, at least to judge from Scott Pask's set, which nods architecturally to Yankee Stadium, and the central character, who brings to mind Derek Jeter. Aside from the sexuality, I hasten to add. *Take Me Out* comes to the Joseph Papp Public Theatre from a successful run at London's Donmar. I saw Joe Mantello's production in both towns and, while the talky detours through bits of baseball arcana improved over the voyage, I found the core of the play even more perplexing and unsatisfying. But what do I know? The potent mix of gayness and baseball looks like making *Take Me Out* a rare hit for the Public.

Let us celebrate first the cuteness of the title, which encapsulates pretty neatly the concerns of the play—not just the question of "homophobia in sports" (as the gay critics say) but the other pressures on the world delineated by Jack Norworth in a song nearly a century old now:

> Buy me some peanuts and Crackerjack
> I don't care if I never get back
> Let me root, root, root for the home team . . .

In one of the half-submerged allusions to the title, someone tells the hero, "Life is so tiny, so daily. This—you—take me out of it." In *Take Me Out*, Richard Greenberg is

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writing as much about the tensions between contemporary America and its venerable myths, as represented by "the old ball game" and the new ball game (gay sex).

Already you're reminded of the real difference between sport and theater. In baseball, either team starts out with the possibility of winning: even my poor old Montreal Expos, bereft of money, owned by the wrong guys, and under a League death sentence, can pull it off. On the stage, the options are more limited. Told that Greenberg sets up a clash between two players—the gay guy and a bigoted Southern cracker—we can pretty much guess whose side we're meant to take: "Let me root, root, root for the homo/ If he don't win it's a shame." In sports terms, the theater these days is professional wrestling of the most obvious kind: it steers well clear of the genuine thrill of the unexpected outcome. In Britain, there's a famous saying by the late Bill Shankley, the manager of Liverpool Football Club (i.e., soccer club): "Football isn't a matter of life and death. It's more important than that." Greenberg posits a similar argument at considerably greater length: he embraces the cliché—baseball is a metaphor for America—and then dismisses it as inadequate. Baseball, he tells us, is superior to American democracy because there's no pretence that someone won't lose: "Democracy is lovely. But baseball is more mature," a gay accountant tells us. "It has the tragic vision which democracy lacks." But tragedy is the fatal flaw that pre-ordains our fate: the great thing about sport is that, up until the final whistle, it can go either way. You play brilliantly and then in a momentary lack of concentration five minutes before the end you throw it all away. Alternatively, the giant-killers look like they'll pull it off, but ultimately the bigger, richer, more professional, more talented team wins. In sports, every narrative is equally viable. In your average play, it's not.

I found myself musing on this more than I expected to because, when I first caught this play overseas, I'd confused "Richard Greenberg" with "Richard Nelson." Nelson is an American author rather more popular in London than New York with (for my tastes) an endearingly misanthropic bent. He wrote a play called *Some Americans Abroad*, gleefully trashing his compatriots, and then followed it with *New England*, about the ghastliness of Brits in America. I was looking forward to a Nelson romp through the pieties of political correctness. But, reading the program, my heart sank: not Nelson, but Greenberg. Richard Greenberg is a far more tastefully constrained playwright I first became acquainted with a decade or so back, with *Eastern Standard*, a play so well-named it could almost serve as a programming-by-numbers kit for New York drama of the late twentieth century. It had a disillusioned architect, an actress-waitress, two gays (one with AIDS), and two sets (an upscale restaurant and a Long Island summer home). Why was the architect disillusioned? He felt bad because he'd put up a ziggurat which "blocks the light from East Thirty-fourth Street to West Seventy-seventh Street." Greenberg has broadened his range since then, turning to subjects which require a bit of research, like the old-time quiz-show scandals (*Night and Her Stars*). But, even so, his characters still seem as socially, emotionally, and geographically confined as they were in *Eastern Standard*.

He had two inspirations for *Take Me Out*. First, about three years ago, he suddenly developed an interest in baseball—in his play, a gay sad-sack of a financial adviser undergoes a similar Pauline conversion. Next, he noticed a couple of stories about the relationship between Brendan Lemon, a gay journalist, and an unnamed pro ballplayer—you may recall Mike Piazza calling a press conference to deny rumors he was the player in question. In its way, that's a funnier idea than Greenberg's: a world where celebrities call press conferences to disclose what sexuality they're not. But, although the author's own plot goes off on a different tack, his protagonist's name does

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appear to doff its cap slyly at Mr. Lemon, while hinting not so subtly at a career death wish: the New York Empires' golden boy is called Darren Lemming. Played by Daniel Sunjata, he's a gum-chewing charmer, an amiably confident telegenic hunk with one of those dreamy soft-focus biogs the networks love: he's an ethnic mixture, the son of a biracial marriage, etc. Within minutes, he's at a press conference announcing his homosexuality, without warning and with no apparent reason: "I hope this sends a message that it's OK," he says blithely. "Any young man, creed, whatever, can go out there and become a ball player. Or an interior decorator."

Well, it gets a laugh. But the voice you hear is the author's, not the character's. Truth to tell, for the first gay ballplayer on the New York stage Darren Lemming is a bit of an empty suit. "I don't have a secret," he says at one point, "I am a secret"—which would be a neat line from a Bond villain but feels like a cop-out here. You see what Greenberg's getting at: great sporting figures are elusive; they make some of the worst guests on talk-shows; they regularly provide some of the most extreme examples of the great gulf between the art and the man. Darren Lemming would not be the first sporting hero you dig deep inside only to find there's no there there, other than the grace and intelligence of what he does on the field. Yet, even by these standards, he seems hollow. His decision to come out is weirdly unmotivated: he has no great love, he's not living a lie, he doesn't date. In the grand tradition of so many gay characters on Broadway and in Hollywood, Darren seems entirely asexual or at any rate determinedly abstinent. "If I'm gonna have sex—and I am, because I'm young and rich and famous and talented and handsome, so it's a law—I'd rather do it with a guy," he says. "But when all is said and done, Kippy? I'd rather just play ball." Yet even that's somehow unpersuasive. Darren doesn't even have the bottomless capacity for self-love that so many celebrities have: he wears his heroic status feather-lightly. He's a pretext, a convenience. Given all the truly original characters baseball, for good or ill, has thrown our way, his emptiness seems to diminish the subject matter.

The fact that Darren is a mere construct wouldn't matter so much if the other fellows weren't either. With all the enthusiasm of the newfound convert, Greenberg has written a chit-chatty evening of ruminations on the theme of baseball and then parceled out his points of view to different mouthpieces. *Take Me Out* is a series of philosophical musings interrupted by bursts of unconvincing plot. There are some dazzling soliloquies, like the gay financial adviser's riff on the home-run trot around the bases, which I'll bet will be an audition favorite with actors within weeks. (Denis O'Hare turns into an episode of dotty poetry.) But one of the author's points is that words are an insufficient form of communication, and he uses a lot of them to prove it: in this play, the shortstops speak in long sentences and the pitchers paint a thousand words. The two narrators are absurdly orotund. Kippy, the Empires' auto-didact, routinely shrugs off lines about the "no longer submerged erotic presence in a male sodality." In this locker room, you either deploy ornate polysyllables or you can barely grunt: there ain't no messin' with Mister In-between.

It's a bit hard on the Latino and Japanese members of the team: because Greenberg isn't entirely sure of the words to give them, they never rise above ethnic stereotypes—Hispanic hotheads and inscrutable Orientals. Nor does the character Greenberg chooses to put up in opposition to Darren really convince: Shane Mungit (played by Frederick Weller), a moronic redneck who drives the play to its unearned melodramatic climax. Shane has a John Rocker moment with the media: "I don't mind the colored people—the gooks an' the spics an' the coons an' like that," he says open-mindedly. "But every night to have to take a shower with a faggot!"

On reflection, I may have done Mr.

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Rocker an injustice comparing him to Shane. You'll recall that Mr. Rocker, a relief pitcher for the Atlanta Braves, got into trouble for an interview in *Sports Illustrated*. He had no interest in signing with a New York team, he explained, because he didn't want to wind up riding the Number 7 train to the ballpark sitting next to "some kid with purple hair next to some queer with AIDS right next to some dude who just got out of jail for the fourth time next to some twenty-year-old mom with four kids." The great Commissioner, Bud Selig, was not amused. He declared that the player's bigoted, homophobic remarks were "reprehensible and completely inexcusable" and ordered him to undergo "psychiatric tests" to determine whether Mr. Rocker was off his proverbial.

Psychiatric tests? It's some years since I last rode the Number 7, but I'd say Rocker's description was, though a tad mean-spirited, a not inaccurate breakdown of the passenger demographic. He left out some gratuitous remarks on the weight of the local womenfolk but, that aside, on the prevalence of purple hair, unwed moms, HIV infection, and repeat offenders enjoying their liberty he is, so to speak, in the ballpark. *Pace* Commissioner Selig and his pals in the white coats with the physical restraints and the large hypodermic, being insane enough to say such things to a reporter is not yet the same as being insane clinically.

In New York, there were innumerable comments on how Shane Mungit was "a John Rocker." In London, no one had heard of John Rocker, and there was a feeling, even with an audience generally predisposed to believe the worst of rural southern Americans, that the role was somewhat underwritten. It's the differences between Rocker and Mungit that are revealing: John Rocker may be an idiot, he may not be very nice, but he's not inarticulate. His sweeping demolition of the Number 7's passenger manifest is vivid, atmospheric and, if anything, over-brimming with local color. By contrast, Shane Mungit is just about sentient. For Richard Greenberg to have constructed a homophobic bigoted redneck à la Rocker would have meant occasionally allowing him the last line, the chance to get the better of his more enlightened verbal sparring partners every now and then. It would have meant evening the odds, and, alas for his play, Mr. Greenberg isn't that sporting.

Thus, it's not enough for Mungit to be boorish about showering with faggots. It has to be a consequence of family dysfunction, of deeply suppressed anxieties, of fear and self-degradation. For example, the pitcher has "a cleanliness thing." At one point, Darren finds himself alone in the shower with Mungit, fiercely scrubbing away. "Cleanliness is next to godliness," he quips, somewhat self-regardingly. Again, you hear the author, not the character, and you wonder whether Mungit was given his clean-freak tic for any other reason than to enable the joke. The cracker doesn't even get it. What a bozo, eh? "All these showers you take. You just tryin' to scrub away the skin?" asks Darren. "You tryin' to get through all these layers of tissue an' organs an' stuff to get to where the real dirt lies?"

The sporting life is a lot more interesting before you try to fit it to the stock characters of contemporary drama. There's all kinds of dirt and depravity about in professional sports: as an Australian headline put it last year, "Super Bowl Stained by Murder, Rape, Prostitution and Lap Dancing"—and not all or even any of those incidents involved a rural white psycho redneck. But, as with so many other dramas about prejudice, Greenberg is too prejudiced to give his characters a fair shot. This would be a more engaging play if Shane Mungit weren't just a slapdash cartoon of a hillbilly homophobe, a snob's idea of white trash, right down to the Eighties biker look. Frederick Weller is a strong, reliable actor, and he has a nice way of loping and looking blank, but there's simply nothing for him to play here except the author's biases.

Round about this point, you also spot the

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other curious feature of Greenberg's New York Empires: even with the gay thing factored out, this is a locker-room with almost no locker-room camaraderie. The entire team seems to have broken down into isolated sub-groups: they're not a "team" at all; the Latinos converse with each other in Spanish, the Japanese guy keeps to himself, emptying himself "like a prairie" in order to play American for a few hours per week. It's a strange vision of a home team that no longer feels at home, a group so fractured by its various identities that it has nothing to unify it other than the enemy. Greenberg seems to be sidling up to a big thought: if baseball is a metaphor for America, then the New York Empires embody a fractious, confused, multicultural society all too well.

In that respect, let me praise the male nudity. In London, where the locals think baseball is a silly girly game called rounders, the shower scenes were the big selling point. It's a much fuller Monty than *The Full Monty*: as a West End press agent assured me, it's all the meat and two veg you could want. The justification for the nudity isn't entirely persuasive: Darren's decision to come out means that the "erotic presence" is, as Kippy says, "no longer submerged"; the casual joshing and towel-snapping are a thing of the past. For those of us who went to all-boys' schools, it's hard to believe an entire team is that insecure.

Nevertheless, that's what happens here. In the shower scenes, everyone's edgy and ill at ease—all because of one guy. Joe Mantello choreographs these episodes with the precision of a Rockettes number and almost as clunkily: the body language of the players is awkward, they avoid catching each other's eyes or anything else. There is even a dropped soap gag, and, as the boys gingerly attempt to retrieve it without offering their bottoms to Darren, Kippy says something or other about "loss of innocence." (I didn't catch it all. Like most paying customers, I was admiring the lathered buttocks.) Ben Brantley in *The New York Times* described the actors as being self-conscious about being self-conscious. And he's right. That's because the moment is fake. They don't believe it, and you can tell they don't.

But, if it seems deficient as a response to one man's avowed gayness, the copious male nudity works fine for the play's broader metaphoric point: the subversion of the masculine ethos by the spirit of the age. The Empires' locker room was a Martian enclave in a Venusian world, and once the Venusians have penetrated there's no going back. Even if you dispute the point, once you spot it, it's hard not to enjoy the nude scenes. For what could be a better metaphor for a changing America than a changing room? And what could more literally illustrate the difficulties we have coping with change in the public space than the difficulties we have coping with changing in a public space? In a world where we're no longer sure who's on the home team and who's batting for the other side, the disintegration of the communal shower is a fine image. We're supposed to celebrate diversity; it's meant to make life much richer and more enjoyable. But Greenberg's nude scenes suggest that a multitude of identities leads only to a community more nervous, insecure, unsure of what to do. And, what the heck, even if this doesn't work as a metaphor for America, it seems to me just dandy for the American theater, where identity politics seems to have paralyzed the pen. The big themes of the play fit as tightly as figure-hugging baseball pants, but peel them away and you can't help noticing how uncomfortably the soapy stereotypes—inscrutable Jap and dumb-ass cracker—all fit together. Where is the dramatist with the courage to bend down and pick up the soap? It's not Richard Greenberg.

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Art

"Erotic prudery"?

by James Panero

If you were to choose among François Boucher (1703–1770), Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), and Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805), Greuze is certainly the big eighteenth-century French painter who got away. He is perhaps best known for *Broken Eggs* (1756, Metropolitan Museum), which, like so much of French art from the eighteenth century, is about sex, but which communicates none of the consequence-free kewpie fantasies of his contemporaries. A young woman sits by a spilled basket of her cracked and over-easy innocence; her parents guffaw and point; a little boy stands beside a half-barrel table attempting (of course in vain) to reassemble one of these metaphor-scrambled eggs. At first the theatrical message seems clear: young ladies, stay virtuous! A quick look through my 1966 edition of H. W. Janson's *History of Art* communicates a similar impression: "Greuze has neither wit nor satire. His pictorial sermon illustrates the social gospel of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: that the poor, in contrast to the immoral aristocracy, are full of 'natural' virtue and honest sentiment."

I do not care to cast aspersions on the great Janson. But for me, a close-up investigation into Greuze—and Greuze demands further investigation, the details are so abundant—always throws these sermons into shades of moral doubt. In *Broken Eggs*, what do we make of the tiny bow and arrow resting on the barrel beside the boy (James Thompson has suggested he is a plainclothes Cupid)? If this is only a scene about virginal guilt, why have most of the eggs remained intact, including one now rolling over to the boy's right foot? In the interaction between the parents, what is the father saying? Is it possible that he is trying to calm the mother, not chastise the daughter? And what about the expression on the young woman's face? Yes, this is a meditation on erotic abandon. But the daughter alternates between contemplation and shame, her emotions broad-ranging, her expressions entirely unclear and far from didactic.

Such ambiguities are hallmarks of Greuze, and in our confusion we are not alone. In the *Paris Sketch Book*, Thackeray perhaps put it best, writing that Greuze's paintings "have charms for French critics which are difficult to be discovered by English eyes."

There are many benefits to the exhibition *Greuze the Draftsman*,[1] which I saw at the Frick earlier this year. (The exhibition is currently on view in Los Angeles.) One benefit

1 "Greuze the Draftsman" opened at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, on September 10 and remains on view until December 1, 2002. It has been joined by an ancillary show entitled *Greuze the Painter: Los Angeles Works In Context*. The exhibition was previously seen at The Frick Collection, New York, from May 14–August 4, 2002. A catalogue of the exhibition has been published by Merrell Publishers Limited in association with The Frick Collection (284 pages, $75).

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was proximity to the Frick's permanent collection and its masterworks from eighteenth-century France. There is Boucher's nubile *Madame Boucher* (1743), who at twenty-seven is going on sixteen (this painting bears the nickname "Boucher's Untidy Venus," quite appropriately); there is the fantastic *Progress of Love* panels (1771–1773) in the Fragonard room, with their putti and assignations; there is Chardin's *Lady With Bird Organ* (1753), in the crystal-clear style of seventeenth-century Dutch painting, a sumptuous distraction. Dismissing all of them, the curator Edgar Munhall writes: "In comparison with [Greuze's] achievement, Boucher appears monotonous; Fragonard, sublime but lacking a tragic, visceral quality; Chardin, practically nonexistent save for the pastels."

The subterranean special-exhibition rooms of the Frick, accessed only by a single-file spiral staircase tucked in a corridor off the ticket room, have been kept like much else at the museum—that is, "user-unfriendly." But these tight, taupe-colored spaces have also proven to be excellent venues for drawings (there is currently installed an exhibition of academic drawings from the École des Beaux-Arts, for example).

Edgar Munhall brought together the first ever Greuze retrospective at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, in 1976, and is largely responsible for renewed public interest in Greuze. He has not limited *Greuze the Draftsman* to the sketch studies of the artist's final paintings (Greuze obsessed over his studies), but also included the gray ink wash and black chalk after-models Greuze composed as studies for his engravers. This makes for a dynamic exhibition strategy, but it also prompts at least one caveat: it helps to come prepared with some knowledge of Greuze's painting, not just for the recognition of character studies in the larger scenes, for example with the portrait *Boy with a Broken Egg, Study for "The Broken Eggs"* (1756), but also to stay aware of the rich palettes Greuze was able in the end to employ.

One of the first drawings you encountered at the Frick came from the very end of Greuze's drafting process. The engraving by J. Massard of *The Beloved Mother* (1775) was worked up from a brush and gray ink wash over black chalk drawing by Greuze, which was installed on an opposite wall. A string of preparatory drawings and drafts for the image were on view further in the show. Only when you come across these studied preparations does Greuze *the draftsman*, the meticulous student of human expression and emotion, become differentiated from Greuze the effortless stage manager and Greuze the dramatist.

The nuances and uncertainties of facial expression are not at the forefront of *Beloved Mother* (final version). Instead we first see the big movements: the embracing arms of the children around their mother, the spread hands and forward steps of the father rushing in from his hunt. But character expressions gradually erode this idyllic image of domestic bliss. It's not a complete turn of image, but rather an erosion of idealism into a vision of the real world—a staged scene with real players. And Greuze has studied every aspect of the composition: from the snouts of the hunting spaniels to the open right hand of the seated grandmother.

If the face communicates the language of emotion, Greuze is our Champollion. He deciphers the heart's imponderables even within the quiver of a lip. The husband's smile in *Beloved Mother* has a downturned corner (six children clawing at his wife, quite a shock). But the face of the beloved mother herself most attracts us. Down the corridor in the left exhibition room of the Frick, Munhall positioned what was certainly the gem of the show: a pastel in red, black, and white chalks on light brown paper of a head-study for beloved mother. Here is Greuze in all his clever uncertainties: the pastel tones of the flesh alternate between red and pink to a shiny gray, the hooded eyes and cringe of the mouth place the figure in the contrapposto throes of agony and ecstasy. Upon seeing this in 1765, Diderot composed one of his most famous passages:

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> Here, my friend, is evidence of how much ambiguity there may be in the best picture. You see this lovely fish wife, rather plump, who has her head thrown back, her coloring pale, her elaborate bonnet in disarray, with her expression a mixture of pain and pleasure, revealing a moment of ecstasy sweeter to experience than suitable to paint? Now then, this is the sketch, the study of the beloved mother. How is it that here a figure is decent and there it ceases to be? This half-open mouth, these watery eyes, this thrown-back pose, this swollen throat, this voluptuous mixture of pleasure and pain causes eyes to be averted and all decent women to blush. Besides, if women quickly pass by this work, men stop in front of it for a long time; that is, those men who are connoisseurs and those who, pretending to be connoisseurs, come to enjoy a spectacle of powerful voluptuousness, and those who, like myself, combine both motivations. There are, on her forehead, and between the forehead and the cheeks, and from the cheeks to the bosom, incredible total passages; this teaches you to see nature and reminds you that there is such a thing. You must see the details of that swollen throat, which words cannot describe. This is absolutely beautiful, true to life, and scientifically observed.

I cannot improve on that. But let me add that the experience of investigation and discovery that Diderot limns is one that *Greuze the Draftsman* offers again and again in the studies Munhall has assembled.

It is also worth noting that if paintings like *A Marriage Contract* were intended as moral lessons, they were lessons Greuze left unheeded. His 1759 marriage to Anne-Gabrielle Babuti "would soon disintegrate into a private nightmare and a public scandal," records Munhall in his very lively catalogue, "due largely to Madame Greuze's fiery character, her loose life, and meddling with her husband's affairs." Estrangement, court proceedings, alimony, and a recently legalized practice called divorce stretched over Greuze's private life from 1785 to 1793. "He's an excellent artist, but a very disagreeable character," wrote Greuze's close friend Diderot in a letter to the sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet in 1767. "One should have his drawings and his paintings," Diderot continued, "and leave the man at that. Furthermore, his wife is, by unanimous consent (and when I say unanimous, I leave out neither hers nor that of her husband), one of the most dangerous creatures on earth. I should not give up hope that one fine day, her Imperial Majesty might not send her on tour to Siberia."

Diderot was hardly alone in this harsh judgment: "I renounce, not the works of Greuze, but indeed the man himself," wrote Catherine II of Russia. Early fame and an undiminished ego led to an invitation to join the French Royal Academy, as a genre painter, in 1755. When the Academy finally demanded that Greuze present his reception picture twelve years later (or risk expulsion from the Salons), Greuze decided to present a history painting as his entry (a style more prestigious than genre painting, so why not?). And of course the genre scenes that Greuze had so carefully composed throughout his career were nothing less than the history paintings of domestic life; they were "a complete treatise on domestic morality" wrote the abbé Philippe Bridard de la Garde.

The judges of the Academy conferred over *Septimius Severus and Caracalla* (1769) and admitted Greuze—but as a genre painter only! This was the ultimate insult (although deserved—*Severus and Caracalla* is pretty bad). Greuze did not exhibit in the Salon again for decades, yet he enjoyed an international reputation in many ways through sales of his drafts, which were often intended to serve as stand-alone works in addition to studies for larger pieces.

The popularity of Greuze waned in the revolutionary years of David and neoclassicism (politics held more interest than family life), and Greuze died in the Louvre in 1805 under the care of Dr. Guillotin, who was there not as his executioner, but as his caretaker. Interest in Greuze picked up later in the nineteenth century, to the point that Sherlock Holmes in *The Valley of Fear* was

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able to spot the criminal Professor Moriarty through an expensive Greuze (how could he afford it?): "in the year 1865 a picture by Greuze entitled *La Jeune Fille à l'Agneau* fetched one million two hundred thousand francs—more than forty thousand pounds—at the Portalis sale."

In the last century, however, Greuze's stock has slumped. The historian Walter Friedlander, echoing a common sentiment in his *David to Delacroix*, wrote that:

> Everything is haunted by an effete and washed-out rococo which, in ridding itself of overt eroticism, has produced a more painful *volupté décente*, a kind of lascivious chastity. Chastity and the related virtues were portrayed with half-nude bosoms and draperies clinging to the body in the manner of the antique. Greuze's innocently voluptuous young maidens are typical examples of this sort of erotic prudery.

A tough assessment, but one with which *Greuze the Draftsman* leads you to disagree. Perhaps no one disagrees more than Edgar Munhall, who has singularly attached himself in admiration and dedication to this elusive artist. On two occasions when I visited the Frick show, Munhall whirled through the exhibition leading groups of friends. I could not be happier than to slide quietly behind his footsteps. *Greuze the Draftsman* is that special achievement you find so rarely, and Munhall that curator rarer still.

Exhibition note

"Stuart Davis: Art and Theory, 1920–1931" at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. September 10–December 15, 2002

Anyone familiar with the paintings of Stuart Davis (1892–1964) knows that he had a sense of humor. It's there to see in his rambunctious rhythms, eye-popping palette and cartoon-like distillations of form; it is perhaps most readily apparent in his terse and slangy appropriations of popular culture. Just in case one needs a reminder of this great artist's wit there is *Greek Backwards* (1921), a watercolor drawing included in *Stuart Davis: Art and Theory, 1920–1931*, a tiny yet beautifully considered exhibition at the Pierpont Morgan Library. The humor in the piece is evident in its form, in the lighter-than-air ballet his cobbled shapes engage in. Yet in writing the word "Greek" backwards on the page, Davis also takes a more literal dig at Cubism, the wellspring of his art, and the contemporaneous response to it. At the time, Modern painting was largely considered to be unintelligible by a skeptical general public. "It's all Greek to me" may not have been the verbatim response to the new art, but it was its essence. Certainly, it provided Davis with a knowing and appreciative punch line.

When the notice of *Art and Theory* arrived in my mailbox, I took stock of its title and feared the worst. Anytime anyone mentions "theory" nowadays one thinks of the Postmodernist tendency to relegate art to extra-aesthetic purpose. Surely an institution as august as the Morgan wouldn't stoop to such faddishness? Happily, it doesn't. Gathering together a sketchbook, a journal, prints, drawings, and a single oil on canvas, MOMA's *Lucky Strike* (1921–22), *Art and Theory* is what I think of as a "thinking" show: an exhibition that provides a peek into an artist's inner workshop. It is, in other words, a show concerned more with *how* than with *what*. If that makes *Art and Theory* sound like a specialist's exhibition, I suppose it is—but that doesn't mean it's for specialists only. The assorted visitors I encountered at the Morgan were fascinated by how Davis articulated his art. They were happy to get in to his head.

And Davis has a head worth getting into. One of the most fascinating items in *Art and Theory* is Davis's journal. Written in a propulsive script, it contains sketches and notes about the nature of art, both in general and his own. In the entry on display at the Morgan, dated May 27, 1922, we read

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about "uni-planar" and "multi-planar" paintings: " . . . in the first case, the plane of the canvas is used throughout and all the modeling is done on the plane. In the second case there are a series of superimposed major planes each one of which has its own details." Included are a pair of illustrations that, while simple, succinctly illuminate the distinctions between the two. Continuing further, Davis likens the act of painting a picture to the "way . . . a mechanic puts an automobile together." This cut-and-dried pragmatism is exactly what we would expect from an artist who put an indelibly American stamp on the Cubist idiom.

How American is Davis? The answer is through and through. "Starting now," he wrote in April of 1922, "I will begin a series of paintings that shall be rigorously logical. American not French. America has had her scientists, her inventors, now she will have her artist." One could accuse Davis of gross egotism had he not so completely fulfilled that ambition. Of course, his sense of himself as an American was shot through with a sardonic self-awareness; elsewhere he states: "I do not belong to the human race but am a product made by the American Can Co. and the N.Y. Evening Journal." Just as typical is this proclamation of patriotic purpose: "I too feel the thing Whitman felt—and I too will express it in pictures—America—the wonderful place we live in." After declaring his love for "another great American art expression," rag-time music, Davis decisively sums up: "So then, I want direct simple pictures of classic beauty expressing the immediate life of the day. I want this now, always have wanted it and always will want it." A fervent embrace of life defines Davis's *oeuvre*. Notwithstanding his tendency to crack wise, he is one of the most optimistic painters we've ever had.

Davis's hearty take on life and art is apparent in the handful of pictures at the Morgan. If it seems that I have given them short shrift, it is only because Davis the theoretician—who is, after all, the focus of the exhibition—is such a delightful find. The excerpts from Davis's journals published in the catalogue will be of great interest not only for fans of the artist, but also for anyone who cares about the art of painting. Some of his comments seem particularly prescient as to the failings of the contemporary scene. "As regards theories and formulas," Davis writes, " . . . if your picture is merely a chart illustrating these premises it will be lifeless." This will ring a bell for anyone who regularly makes the rounds of Chelsea, as will his correlation of the "Dadas" with "jugglers with whom we have been acquainted in vaudeville for some years." (Would that jugglers were the worst of our problems!) The clarity of Davis's journals should serve as a model for writing about art. His utter lack of pretense is winning, the just-the-facts-ma'am tone bracing. It is time for some editor to compile Davis's various writings in book form. Perhaps *Art and Theory* will put that much-needed project in motion.

—*Mario Naves*

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Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

It was an interesting beginning-of-season. The big news, clearly, was the arrival of Lorin Maazel at the New York Philharmonic. Seventy-two years old, Maazel has replaced Kurt Masur, who was given the boot after eleven years. Maazel has had many tenures elsewhere: in Cleveland, in Pittsburgh, in Vienna (one could go on). Wherever he has been, he has created "controversy," meaning that critics have chafed at his music-making, and players have chafed at his treatment of them. But he was the choice of New York Philharmonic personnel. Say this for union control, or near-union control: If you don't like the guy with the stick, you have no one to blame but yourselves.

Maazel began his tenure in New York with an all-Beethoven concert: the *Leonore* Overture No. 3, op. 72b, and the Ninth Symphony. Thus, the conductor could not have picked more noble music with which to start. All through this concert, Maazel was thoroughly himself: that is, he was mannered, affected, and ultra-controlling; he was also smooth, skillful, and fascinating. Maazel may infuriate you, but he makes you pay attention to him. And, of course, he is not likely to change. He has come this far—why should he renovate himself? His New York tenure will surely be just like his others: If you liked those, you'll like this; if you didn't—well, his contract's not forever.

After Maazel's opening series, André Previn came in, with the pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet. This was a very good pair, as they are superb Ravelians and they played Ravel—the G-major concerto. Previn, like Maazel, is in his seventies, and doing noticeably fine work, chiefly as conductor and composer (he is also a fair pianist and an excellent writer of English prose). That he also just married the young German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter—his fifth wife—only makes him more interesting. He was once married to Mia Farrow. Woody Allen is—oh so weirdly—his son-in-law. Someone ought to write up Previn's life (but then, no one would do it as well as he).

Following this series were two from Maazel himself. The first was with the twenty-year-old pianistic sensation Lang Lang. (Goes an old verse, "New York, New York/ The city so nice,/ They named it twice.") Lang is a brilliant technician, and loaded with talent, but his Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 2 was marred by interpretive nonsense. Maazel, however, laid on a wonderful Sibelius Second Symphony, and a gripping "Night on Bald Mountain" (Mussorgsky). These works are familiar—even over-familiar—but the conductor managed to freshen them at every turn.

He did the same in the next series, whose big piece was the Tchaikovsky Fifth. Maazel can be quite idiosyncratic. He takes great liberties with tempos, and he employs the most unusual dynamics. And always, he emphasizes things in a score that you have never thought of, or had never really

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noticed. Again, he holds your attention, and will probably do so until he departs. Certainly the "Philharmonic family" is happy. Stuffy, demanding old Kurt is gone, and everyone is grinning. They should enjoy it while they can.

The Metropolitan Opera had a successful start as well. James Levine is still there, in the pit, in his twenty-ninth year with the company. He is set to take over the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2004, giving him the major symphonic podium he has long needed (in the opinion—unsolicited—of some of us). But he will stick, stubbornly, with the Met, although perhaps in reduced capacity.

The Met's opening-night gala was both fun—gala-like—and profound. This is what the company delivers at its best: entertainment (we're talkin' opera, after all) and uplift. The Met did three separate acts of three different operas. They had one thing in common, Plácido Domingo, who retains his position as the house's number-one guy, and the world's only remaining supertenor, now that Luciano Pavarotti has more or less self-destructed.

The first act of the evening was rather touching, as it featured the veteran—very veteran—soprano Mirella Freni. The act was the second from Giordano's *Fedora*, something that the Italian diva has fallen back on in her autumnal years. She still sounds like herself, if a greatly "mature" self. Her appearance was not an announced Met farewell, but it had the feel of one, and the audience, in its adoration and reluctance to let her go, seemed to suspect that it was.

The final two acts of the gala featured two of the most inspired pairings in opera today: Domingo and the Russian mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina as Samson and Dalila (in the Saint-Saëns opera), and Domingo and the American soprano Renée Fleming as Otello and Desdemona (in the Verdi opera). All sang lushly, convincingly, and well-nigh definitively. The Met is capable of showcasing the best, and on this night it did not fail.

Following this, the company offered Puccini's *Turandot*, another opera by Giordano—*Andrea Chénier*—and Strauss's *Elektra*. The third of these is one of James Levine's specialties—although he has so many, it seems wrong to call them "specialties." Over the years, he has had some great Elektras, Chrysothemises, and Klytämnestras: One thinks of Hildegard Behrens in the title role, and one thinks, perhaps especially, of Deborah Voigt as Chrysothemis. (Voigt, incidentally, in early October, sang the title role of Strauss's "Egyptian Helen" with the American Symphony Orchestra in Avery Fisher Hall—smashing.) For this run, however, Levine's Elektra was the Wisconsin-born soprano Deborah Polaski, and his Chrysothemis was the Finnish wonder Karita Mattila. But the most gripping singer in this production? The Klytämnestra, Marjana Lipovsek, a Slovenian mezzo-soprano making a late-ish Met debut. Her every word, note, and move commanded.

Maestro Levine was in the pit for the opening-night gala (of course), for *Elektra* (of course), and for *Chénier* (whose title role was filled by the ultimate Chénier, Domingo). For the *Turandot*, however, Levine relinquished the pit to Carlo Rizzi, the Italian conductor who for many years led the Welsh National Opera. I'm reliably informed that Rizzi, married to a Welsh woman, actually speaks Welsh, with a pronounced Italian accent. A marvel, if not a first. He is a competent conductor, but not one to sweep you out of your chair—at least based on this *Turandot*. His tempos were quite "broad," to use a polite word, and often the score dragged. This opera—Puccini's last (and, indeed, one he left incomplete)—can have a symphonic feel, in the better performances. It sweeps, builds, and grips, from beginning to end. That feeling was lacking from Rizzi.

The Metropolitan Opera's *Turandot* is a Zeffirelli *Turandot*, born in 1987. This is the sort of spectacle that you either love or hate. I am firmly, hopelessly, on the love side. I sometimes think of this *Turandot* as "The Wedding Cake *Turandot*," because the Imperial Palace scenes—white, glittering,

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multi-layered—look like a wedding cake, at least as much as the monument to Victor Emmanuel in Rome does. These scenes are astounding in their pageantry and splendor, causing the senses to ache. The rest of the production is hardly less impressive. It is something out of Cecil B. DeMille, with a cast of thousands, making Puccini's China seem teeming. This *Turandot* is one of the great visual delights in opera. And if you can't indulge in a little excess, what is grand opera for?

The original Calaf in this production was Plácido Domingo, but he was otherwise engaged. Assuming the role was the man sometimes thought of as "the Russian Domingo," Vladimir Galouzine, the tenor who made an enormous impression at the Met as Alexei in Prokofiev's *Gambler*. Sadly, he was not so compelling as Calaf. Certainly his voice is special: bold, resplendent, heroic. Many people are eager to hear his Otello. But he was somewhat stiff as Calaf, with little lightness, grace, or "release"—that essential ingredient for an Italian, or Italianate, tenor. He opened up somewhat in Act II, but his big moment—the aria "Nessun dorma"—was a dud (to use technical musical language). It fell dead from his mouth. It was labored, artless, and not remotely Italianate. One felt that a Russian tenor was trying on Italian clothes, which were ill-fitting. Obviously, you don't have to be Italian to be Calaf (see Domingo, Jussi Bjoerling, and a host of others), but you have to inhabit the style.

Our Turandot? Andrea Gruber, a stalwart American. She began with a case of the wobbles, in the tradition of many a Turandot before her, but she settled down to deliver an authoritative and memorable performance. She simply slew the aria "In questa reggia," one of the most unusual Puccini ever wrote. From her throat emerged a kind of beautiful ugliness (as anyone who knows this aria will appreciate). Her intonation was faultless, and, in fact, everything about her singing was superbly controlled. The entire Riddle Scene—something out of *Quiz Show*—was palpably tense, thanks to Gruber (and thanks, too, to be fair, to Rizzi, and also to Galouzine). In the opera's concluding pages—written (which is to say, finalized) by Franco Alfano—Gruber was overpowering, Nilssonesque. She was a battleship, but a gleaming and attractive one.

As for the opera itself, anyone who doubts Puccini's greatness—who thinks of him as just a purveyor of classical pop—should consider *Turandot*. The opera is a strange mixture of flat-out genius and Oriental kitsch. In any case, as a friend of mine noted, the composer had come a long way from *La Bohème*. Then again, what's wrong with *La Bohème*?

Over at Carnegie Hall, the season began with Daniel Barenboim; it will end with him too. In the first days of October, Barenboim conducted his orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, in three concerts; in June, donning his pianistic hat, he will play the Beethoven sonatas—all of them, all thirty-two. Oddly enough, Barenboim still seems like the "new" conductor of the CSO, the young man who took over from George Solti. The record shows, however, that he has been there since 1991, and that he is sixty. Barenboim's tenure in Chicago has lasted as long as Kurt Masur's in New York did.

The opening concert was all Spanish, or Spanish-inflected: the first half was devoted to Manuel de Falla, the second to Maurice Ravel (the "Rapsodie espagnole," the "Pavane for a Dead Princess," the "Alborada del gracioso," and "Boléro"). This was a strangely leaden concert, with Barenboim heavy-handed and ungraceful as both conductor and pianist (in Falla's "Nights in the Gardens of Spain"). Even "Boléro," that sure winner, was sloppy and unappealing. The second concert featured Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1, with Radu Lupu, the grave Romanian, at the keyboard—also, from the orchestra alone, music of Wagner and Schoenberg.

The final concert boasted a great Bruckner symphony, the composer's last, his

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Ninth. First, however, there were two shortish pieces, one from the Baroque, the other from today. Barenboim and his players began with Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3. Those players numbered ten, with Barenboim at the harpsichord. Before going on, I might say that it was a pleasure to hear this music played on modern instruments (meaning, orchestral instruments)—so refreshing, in this age of "originalism," full of scratches and hoots. In his farewell concert with the New York Philharmonic last summer, Kurt Masur did something cute. He announced, as an encore, Bach's "Air on the G String" (as it is popularly known). He said that some people would shoot him as a criminal, for attempting such music with the New York Philharmonic, of all groups, but he was going ahead anyway. Everyone applauded and whooped. Masur's was a thrilling act of sedition.

Barenboim and his Chicago ensemble did not cover themselves in glory, however. The Brandenburg's first movement was unsettled: diffuse, soupy, and jumbled. It was perhaps under-rehearsed. At the keyboard, Barenboim played—improvisatorially, it seemed—a beautiful, imaginative "bridge" between movements. It had a nice sense of *fantasia*. The final movement, however, was absurdly fast: comically, intolerably so. The music never really had a chance to present itself. One wanted to holler, "Stop and enjoy this, would you?" Barenboim acted as though he had a train to catch.

The next short piece on the program was a section from Pierre Boulez's 1971 work . . . *explosante-fixe* . . . (the ellipses are part of the title, and tell you that Boulez is a man who means business—always). Serving as soloist here was the CSO's principal flutist, Mathieu Dufour, a fine and stylish player. Barenboim achieved, in the reduced—very reduced—orchestra before him, an admirable balance. And this is an intelligent piece: thought-provoking and not without beauty (no offense to Boulez and his crowd, for whom "beauty" can be something of a fighting word, as well as a swear word).

Bruckner's Ninth Symphony is, in a way, a response to Beethoven, and his Ninth. The symphony—Beethoven's—has hovered over many a composer, and Bruckner revered it, paying frank homage to it in his own Ninth. Daniel Barenboim knows this piece well, and he executed it magnificently. The Ninth is a long, unusual journey—Barenboim understands where it is going, and what it entails. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra did its best for him, playing like the virtuosic body it is. The first movement was majestic, deep, and sensuous (not a word often applied to Bruckner). Barenboim imparted a sense of inevitability. He was, indeed, going somewhere, purposeful. It's a good thing, too, that his tempos were on the brisk side. This piece can't afford to be sluggish—ever—because the sheer repetition and length would be deadly.

In the Scherzo, there were some technical rough spots—some awkward *pizzicato* playing, for example—but behind everything was the drive of a powerful, determined conductor. This movement was rather heavy—a persistent Barenboim trait—but no less effective for it. The Adagio is simply one of the greatest things in music, and it was soulful, hymn-like, and full of pity. Bruckner then rises in triumph, or at least steely resolution. All through this journey, the conductor had a path in mind. He would not deviate from it. Each tempo felt natural, if not demanded. Barenboim never stopped urging his players on, never let them flag, which is crucial in this monumental musical marathon.

There have been a lot of great Bruckner Ninths (along with complete flops, which have been more numerous). Barenboim's was a proud one.

A few days after the Chicagoans left town, Cecilia Bartoli came in, for a program of Baroque music. She has lately recorded Vivaldi and Gluck; she gave a Carnegie Hall audience a good sampling of it, with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment behind her.

About this world-renowned and -beloved

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Italian mezzo-soprano, what is there left to say? Not much, but I will do some repeating: She is one of the most maddening musicians before the public today. She is as maddening as, say, Jessye Norman, and as maddening as was the pianist Vladimir Horowitz before them. What could these three possibly have in common, you ask? They are lavishly talented—and fabulously undisciplined and inconsistent, assaulting music as much as ennobling it. They also approach a score much as Justice Brennan approached the Constitution: as a "living document," into which to pour a river of personal feelings, emotions, and beliefs—to hell with what the composer wanted, poor sap. The composer's piece is only a vehicle for the grand performing Self.

Cecilia Bartoli can't wreck Baroque music as much as she does later music—the strictures are too tight, even for her. She has less leeway. She cannot take a mile—merely a half-mile. I once heard her sing the Séguidille from Bizet's *Carmen*. I knew it was the Séguidille only because the announcer on the radio said so, and because some of the notes resembled those in the original version. Bartoli can't render, say, Handel's "Dove sei" unrecognizable—but she can try.

In Carnegie Hall, she revealed the vocal technique that is unique to her: She can be amazingly hooty, and her passagework is often extremely detached. Interpretively, she is ultra-dramatic, outsize. She's like a mime: When she's sad, she is very, very sad; when she's happy, she's very, very happy. Not much is modulated. Or, as I've said before, she's like a beautiful woman—a naturally beautiful woman—who applies way too much make-up, appearing clownish. You want to wipe off the make-up and say, "Sober up, girl! You're beautiful enough!"

And yet, she is undeniably a thrilling performer. The voice is lovely, and it is fantastically flexible—acrobatic. For example, she can effect huge leaps, reminiscent of Marilyn Horne, who of course had a bigger instrument, and infinitely more discipline, but who could execute the same acrobatics. When Bartoli, at one point, went from a low B to a high B—two octaves away—I could not suppress a *frisson*. Her exhibitionism can be exasperating: She held one G for what seemed like a half-hour, before resuming the aria. You would scald a student for doing this. But . . .

I will close with a confession—one a critic really shouldn't make. Often, I have sat in a darkened concert hall, listening to Cecilia Bartoli, and thought: "She's the most vulgar woman alive. But, heaven help me, I love it."

Concert notes

Galileo Galilei, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York.

Philip Glass is unsure of how many operas he has written, though it is upwards of eighteen. This doesn't quite put him into the Donizetti sphere, but it does distinguish him among twentieth-century composers. *Einstein on the Beach*, a collaboration with Robert Wilson, is his most famous work, and the "history" operas on Gandhi and Akhnaten have been revived. His penchant for examining historical figures continues with *The White Raven*, on the career of Vasco da Gama, and with the current *Galileo Galilei*. *Galileo* premiered last spring at the Goodman Theater in Chicago and was brought to the Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera House as its opening for the 2002 Next Wave Festival.

This ninety-minute "opera," which is more oratorio/pageant than dramatic work, was written by Mary Zimmerman with Glass and Arnold Weinstein and was directed by Zimmerman. It tells Galileo's story backwards in nine scenes, from his blind old age, reminiscing on the past. The opera moves in a retrograde motion from his recantation, inquisition, promulgation of his earth/sun thesis, to when he invented the telescope. Much of the text is derived from original sources.

The epilogue is a Zimmerman conceit: a

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performance of an early opera (by Galileo's father). This serves as a metaphor for Galileo's life, at the end of which he is summoned to Heaven by his beloved dead daughter Marie Celeste.

In fact this ending (which is similar, as I recall it, to the ending of *The White Raven*) allows the work to finish positively rather than on the poignancy of an old man muttering "Eppur si muove," in the opening monologue. What we have is a circus finale—everyone onstage parading and rejoicing at the sanctification of a great name. Not incidentally, audiences find the circus atmosphere infectious.

Glass's music is, of course, instantly recognizable, although the tightly woven musical patterns seem to be loosened nowadays, and the counterpoint melodies that sometimes float overhead are a bit more sentimentalized than before. Glass has, over the years, refined his music-making to a formula that communicates directly to an audience. He lays down orchestral patterns, then overlays conjunct, expressively declamatory vocal lines (more influenced by chant than by melisma). At times, he achieves a sort of austere beauty. Yet the overall feel is one not of movement but of stasis. These pageant-operas that Glass likes to create remind one of those vast tableaux of the Mexican muralists or of Thomas Hart Benton, stretching across walls and courtyards in order to tell a story.

The production was colorful and lively. Thank Heavens, there were no trench coats and fedoras, but period costume, and, in the sixth scene, a visual demonstration of some of Galileo's theorems about the rates at which balls fall through the air or roll down inclines. The experiments provided movement onstage, and they were aided by another innovation: the projection of selected translations and words in differing scripts (depending on the source) on the back wall. Peter Sellars, in his production of *Tannhäuser* in Chicago, first used surtitling as an integral part of the production, but few since have taken up the challenge.

The cast, led by the conductor William Lumpkin and the Eos Orchestra, was a strong one (with many roles doubled) and with two Galileos: John Duykers as the older man and Eugene Perry as the younger one. Duykers in particular, with his very distinctive tenor, gave shape to the historical figure, especially in his opening monologue.

It is difficult to say if these Glass pageant-operas have a future, because they exist in a stillwater of the operatic form. They are, however, an integral part of Glass's compositional interests.

—*Patrick J. Smith*

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The media

The scandal lobby

by James Bowman

Is it, or ought it to be, a legitimate plea in defense of rude or boorish or insulting behavior that it is what the rude or boorish or insulting person "really thinks"? Not many years since, I fancy, no one would seriously have maintained that it was. Even today, we are if anything overly sensitive about giving offense to the *amour propre* of people who are fat or unattractive or stupid or lacking in good taste or good manners. Yet somehow manners themselves have learned to look with indulgence upon the most appalling imputations, so long as they are or can claim to be sincerely believed, against the character, honor, or veracity of people who were once thought to be owed a certain degree of respect and even deference—the President of the United States, say.

True, there were some protests when Congressmen David Bonior and Jim McDermott, speaking from Baghdad, said on "This Week" with George Stephanopoulos that assurances of the good intentions of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi leadership had to be taken "at their face value" while President Bush could only be expected to "mislead the American people" in order to start a war. Michael Kelly called it "obscene" of them. George Will, on the spot, said that it was "the most disgraceful performance by an American official abroad in my lifetime." But Kelly and Will are both supporters of the President's policy on Iraq. Where were the denunciations from his opponents, from principled Democrats and anti-warriors allied with Bonior and McDermott who were prepared to say that the congressmen had put themselves beyond the pale of civilized discourse?

Well, *The New Republic* complained, but rather on tactical than principled grounds: "At a time when Democrats are trying to raise questions about a war with Iraq without appearing unpatriotic or pacifistic," wrote Michael Crowley, "ABC's 'This Week' featured an interview with two liberal congressmen who probably convinced plenty of viewers they are both." Questioned by Tim Russert on "Meet the Press," the Senate Majority Leader, Tom Daschle, said that he wouldn't have said what Bonior and McDermott had said, and that the remarks were "awfully close" to going over the line, but he was only outraged on his own behalf. The President, he thought, had been guilty of at least as grave an insult to him and the Democratic leadership in Congress by saying that they were "not interested in national security."

He had a point. There was a mixup about the occasion and context of the President's remark, Daschle appearing to suppose that it had been said of those, mainly Democrats, who opposed his Iraq policy when in fact it had been said of those, also mainly Democrats, who were holding out against the Bush proposals for a Department of Homeland Security by insisting that the employees of any such department should have the full collective bargaining rights en-

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joyed at present by those deemed *not* to be engaged with national security. But the principle to which Daschle held tight appeared to be that, whatever the context, it was illegitimate and, as the British would say, "unparliamentary" to cast aspersions on one's opponent's patriotism or concern for national security.

Yet only a few days earlier his party's elder statesman and ex-president, Bill Clinton, was broadly hinting to the Labour Party conference in Blackpool, England that his successor was a dangerous character, foolishly inclined to "go it alone" in foreign policy, who had to be restrained by his friend Tony Blair. Under the circumstances, it was hardly likely that the Republicans would agree to a rhetorical armistice. The extreme position in each side's characterization of the other—the Republican contention that the Democrats are unpatriotic and irresponsible and the Democratic contention that the Republicans are trigger-happy and uncaring—appears to have become the default setting for every argument in what is still but increasingly absurdly called the public debate.

It's not that politics have not often, possibly always, been full of venomous hatreds and graceless, baseless insult. Probably politics always will be. But just now things are particularly bad. Robert Novak writes of the "poisonous state of the U.S. Senate" at the moment, to the point that it is "virtually non-functioning" and "like nothing I have seen in forty-five years of covering Washington." He attributes the loss of the Senate's "traditional collegiality" to the hatreds aroused over the Bork confirmation hearings of fifteen years ago, or even the treatment of Abe Fortas twenty years before that. Perhaps so. But bitter struggles like these would not produce such lasting effects if there were still a vocal constituency for rhetorical decency and restraint and responsibility. Yet there is none, or none audible at the moment. And the media, which piques itself on its "objectivity" and so might be expected to comprise such a constituency, is behaving rather like spectators at a street fight, holding the politicians' coats and screaming at them to hit harder, to draw more blood.

Look at Michael Crowley again, writing in the *New Republic*. Gleefully he quotes a joke made by Jim Jordan, executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee about "General Rove" when he "calls in the air strikes in October." But though Jordan immediately pulled back from such a scandalous allegation—saying, "Certainly none of us want[s] to think that the administration, for domestic political reasons, would use the war. I think the temptation will be strong"—Crowley reads this as meaning that Jordan "took the notion seriously, if not quite literally." And he goes on to quote "a senior aide to one Democratic senator" as saying that the party leaders are "largely united" in the opinion that the administration "has manufactured an urgent debate over Iraq in order to win seats in Congress this fall."

He treats the anonymity of this source, as so many journalists do these days, as something rather to recommend it than to be apologized for. The leprous distillment being poured in his ears is the more likely to be the real goods, he thinks, if the poisoner wishes to remain concealed. And he goes on to deconstruct the public pronouncements of named Democrats to show that they must share the view of the anonymous "staffer." When he quotes Tom Daschle as saying that the "politicization" of the war is something to be worried about, but that he, Daschle, is not himself "one who shares the view that it is being politicized," Crowley scoffs at a gentlemanly qualification so "implausibly" made.

Or look at the piece the ABC News political director, Mark Halperin, wrote for *The New York Times* called "Reporters Try the Silent Treatment." At first you might think here, at last, is the voice of decorum and good manners reasserting itself, since Halperin begins by praising the "restraint" of the White House press corps. Unfortunately, what he means is that for once the

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reporters didn't shout their questions out of turn, so permitting Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary, to escape from a grilling designed to force him either to affirm that the president really had questioned Democrats' patriotism or to climb down in the matter of those allegedly "not interested in the security of the American people." Oh no, Ari, Mr. Halperin says, we're not going to allow any fudged diplomatic solution. We want the red meat of a blood insult, or else a humiliating retraction.

Well, you can see how it might sell more papers, or cause more viewers to tune in to the evening news, but no one can suppose it to be in the interest of the country. Politics depends on the fudged diplomatic solution and the press, in its own interests, is increasingly not allowing it. Their rhetoric is not only more strident and uncompromising in itself, but is designed to force politicians to come along down the same road. Of course one sympathizes with the righteous indignation of the conservative columnist Cal Thomas in calling McDermott and Bonior "the Bozos of Baghdad." Their giving the lie to their president on foreign soil, he says, "comes from representatives of a party that defended through impeachment the biggest liar in presidential history." But what does such an insult accomplish?

Say Mr. Clinton deserves that title—even though "the biggest liar in presidential history" is one for which there is some competition. What Thomas doesn't see is that such a characterization, whether true or false, is precisely why McDermott and Bonior said what they said, not because of any particular instance of mendacity on the President's part. You call our guy a liar, we call your guy a liar. Was Clinton corrupt? Then, just as the night follows the day, Bush also will be found to be corrupt. That is just the way the political competition works in the absence of any agreed-upon rhetorical boundaries.

But what if the president really *is* a liar and corrupt? Surely, the fact should not be allowed to pass unnoticed? Would it not be morally and politically irresponsible for the Democrats to fail to call attention to the fact that all the horrors of war were about to be unleashed, that American soldiers were about to be put into harm's way, on the basis of someone's falsehood and disregard of the truth? Would it not be criminally negligent for Republicans to fail to point out that national security was being put at risk solely in order to pay off someone else's political debt to the AFL-CIO? If they truly believe these things, haven't they the duty to speak up and warn the American people of the nefarious business afoot?

Well, no. For the poisoning of the wells of public discourse that results from attributing to one's opponent base and corrupt motives may actually be a worse thing than the evils it seeks to forestall. Just as we recognize that some kinds of security are not worth having at the expense of certain fundamental liberties, so we ought to recognize that political decision-making of a kind that all true patriots and honorable men would advocate becomes impossible when the patriotism and honor of the decision-makers is allowed to be called into question. Maybe even war is better—better for us, if not for the Iraqis—than allowing ourselves to think that our fellow-countrymen make war wantonly and irresponsibly.

"Allowing ourselves to think"—ah, there's the problem. That's why we have no notion (or only the most rudimentary notion) of what it means to be unparliamentary, or to speak, however sincerely, illegitimately and impoliticly. For surely there should be no restraint upon thought? Nor yet upon the freedom to speak the thought? The worship of "free speech" in combination with the American belief in personal authenticity is lethal in this respect. It means that many people, perhaps most people in our country today, would consider anyone who felt constrained by parliamentary or honorable considerations not to say what he thought to be guilty of "hypocrisy."

True, we do have some idea of rhetorical

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excess. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, running for governor of Maryland this autumn, fired a campaign aide who compared her opponent to Hitler. So in the German election campaign did Gerhard Schröder fire his justice minister, Herta Däubler-Gmelin, for comparing President Bush to the late German chancellor. Of course the Germans have good reason to be sensitive about the H-word, but in America even so much restraint as this is not to be relied upon. Back in 1972, George McGovern compared Richard Nixon to Hitler, and he has never felt any need to apologize. In 1964, a great many Democrats compared Barry Goldwater to Hitler and now have forgotten all about it, as I found out when I casually alluded to the matter recently in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*. In any case we ought to have some sense of a limit short of the Hitler analogy—say at the point where we call into question an opponent's good faith.

Thus Terry Moran of ABC to Ari Fleischer: "Can you assure the American people that this elevated threat alert is not part of the administration's effort to convince people that the danger is such that military action against Iraq is necessary?" What could be the point of such a question? It depends on the questioner's assurance that his target *cannot* so assure the American people, since any such assurance must be subject to the same doubt. "I ne'er heard yet," says the insanely suspicious Leontes to his innocent wife Hermione when she denies his charge of adultery in *The Winter's Tale*, "That any of these bolder vices wanted/ Less impudence to gainsay what they did/ Than to perform it first." It is an example of a truth that is nevertheless unreasonable in its context and only serves to remind the audience of the self-reinforcing character of mistrust. Us it reminds of the infinite regress of suspicion and bad feeling that has come to characterize American politics in the post-Watergate era.

But Moran, like McDermott and Bonior, was simply playing the game the way we are used to seeing it played, which is a reminder that the rhetorical weapons of mass destruction that are now so regularly employed in public life sometimes—perhaps often—*do not* arise out of a sincere conviction of the other side's perfidy. If Democrats really thought that the President was an incorrigible liar or Republicans really thought that Democrats put self-interest above the national interest, they could hardly continue to co-operate as much as they do in getting the nation's business done. Among the politicians, such hyperbole is just what each side thinks it has to do to obtain an advantage over the other in the eyes of voters whom everyone supposes to be too stupid to understand any matter of political debate not painted in the crudest of black-and-white contrasts.

Among journalists, who might be thought to have less at stake in the argument, the blackguarding of opponents is as I have suggested much more enthusiastic. This is especially true where, as on *The New York Times*'s editorial pages, the writers and pundits appear to exist in a world so self-contained and self-satisfied about its own moral and political righteousness that they could go for years without ever having to meet anyone from the other side, let alone seriously to consider their views. Yet the *Times* is still enough of a journalistic entity to play the scandal game simply for its own sake, and without regard to the political color of its victims.

Does anyone really suppose, for example, that the newspaper of record's playing up of a Republican report last month that the $1 million in gifts unreported by the Clintons because they were donated to the Bill Clinton Presidential Library was a public-spirited exposure of corruption in high places? Perhaps the Republican congressman Mr. Doug Ose of California, who was the inspiration behind the investigation and who wants tougher rules on presidential gift-giving, thinks so. At least he says he does. According to the *Times*, he "suggested that the people who gave these gifts to the Clin-

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tons could have been trying to gain access to the White House and influence the administration's policy decisions."

Mind you, he is talking here not about satchels full of cash but Navajo blankets and paintings and teapots and various sorts of tchotchkes that world leaders and important people regularly present to each other as confirmations of their importance. Rep. Ose has in his sights a sculpture of a goddess, *with* wooden pedestal, worth $2,100, given by James Riady, the Indonesian banker who has paid millions in fines for his illegal donations to the 1992 Clinton campaign. After those huge illegal campaign contributions, what additional advantage could Riady have hoped for from such a gewgaw? Ose is just playing the political game—any stick with which to beat the other side—which the "scandal"-loving press happily plays along with. Even the massively pro-Clinton *New York Times*.

The same day that the story of Clinton's sculpted goddess broke, fearless and crusading Dana Milbank of *The Washington Post* reported, on the basis of other reports in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Boston Globe*, that "when President Bush served as a director of an energy company 12 years ago, he approved the creation of an off-balance-sheet partnership that reduced the company's debts and improved earnings in a transaction similar to those that led to the collapse of Enron Corp." Similar, eh? That's good enough for this journalistic Savonarola, even though he acknowledges that "unlike Enron, which used partnerships to conceal debts and loss-making operations, Harken's partnership followed accounting rules and was disclosed to investors and regulators." Also that "Bush did not profit personally from the transaction."

What then was the point of reporting it at length a dozen years later in *The Washington Post*? Well, if you look real close you could see "an unwelcome link between Bush and the accounting scandals that have spooked investor confidence this year." That word "link" is obviously a very useful one, since it can cover anything from an accessory before the fact to, well, "similar." That's the point. If our public discourse demands scandal, scandal must and will be found to meet the demand. The point isn't that Bush's behavior was above reproach, any more than Clinton's was in the Whitewater affair. The point is that looking for, and finding, things to reproach him with has become so largely what politics consists of in the media's view.

If we seek for corruption, therefore, do we not find it here? Ought not the media, who see their very existence as depending on their adversarial—that is, mistrustful—position in relation to established power, to be required to identify themselves, jointly and severally, as a lobby? For that is what they are. They are the scandal lobby—the well-funded purveyors of a product potentially much more dangerous than tobacco whose interaction with our elected officials is almost entirely taken up either with the harvest of more scandal or with making sure that the legal obstacles to their processing and marketing of scandal are kept to a minimum. Moreover, their stubborn and insistent refusal to acknowledge their private and pecuniary interest in the scandal they report suggests that they do not themselves deserve the presumption of good faith that they so regularly deny to others. Their frankly unbelievable claim that they *have* no interests—that they are purely objective and bias-free—and so they can never have a conflict of interest and can never be questioned and suspected themselves as they claim to be entitled by their unique (and impossible) position to question and suspect others should be exposed as the fraud it is.

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Fiction chronicle

Suffer the children

by Max Watman

In 1996, *Granta* published the "Best of Young American Novelists" issue, and this list has been famous ever since. The Twenty under Forty have had varying degrees of success, and everyone thinks that someone was left off, and none of that matters because it was, after all, a silly gimmick to sell magazines. Which it did. Jeffrey Eugenides was on the list, as I was recently reminded when I opened his excellent new novel *Middlesex*[1] and found myself reading words I had first read in 1996. His excerpt in *Granta* was from a novel in progress finally published this September. We've been waiting a long time.

Eugenides's first novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, was slim, weird, and beautiful. He wrote it while he worked at the Academy of American Poets, and I like to think that one can tell it was written in the company of poets. Recalling scenes from *The Virgin Suicides* is like breathing ether. Your mind goes languorous and foggy. It is a dreamscape of a book, devoid of humor, full of soft-focus characters and the second person plural pronoun.

Characters with cameos in *The Virgin Suicides* are back, fully developed. Both books take place in suburban Detroit. Both books mention the day that tanks showed up, grinding down the calm suburban streets, during the Detroit riots. *Middlesex*, unlike *The Virgin Suicides*, is funny, big, embracing, and wonderful.

"Chekov was right," says Calliope Stephanides, the protagonist of *Middlesex*, "If there's a gun on the wall, it's got to go off. In real life, however, you never know where the gun is hanging. The gun my father kept under his pillow never fired a shot." Cal's body is the gun, and it satisfies the "narrative requirements."

The reader has known exactly where the gun was hanging from page one, line one: "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974." Cal is a 5-Alpha-reductase Pseudohermaphrodite, and *Middlesex* is her/his autobiographical Bildungsroman.

This is, however, no simple Gender Studies graduate thesis. Cal has read Alexina Barbin's autobiography, which "Michel Foucault discovered in the archives of the French Department of Public Hygiene. . . . Her memoirs, which end shortly before her suicide, make unsatisfactory reading." Eugenides has written a three-generation family history. "Sing, now, O Muse, of the recessive mutation of my fifth chromosome" should give you a sense of its scope. He moves from modern-day Berlin, to the origins of the Black Muslim movement in Detroit, to immigration. Cal's grandfather seizes "the opportunity of transatlantic travel

1 *Middlesex*, by Jeffrey Eugenides; Farrar Straus & Giroux, 544 pages, $27.

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to reinvent himself. . . . Aware that whatever happened now would become the truth, that whatever he seemed to be would become what he was—already an American, in other words." He marries his sister.

For all the moving around, there are no simulacra, no flat tools to serve the authors, intent. We get to know the people of *Middlesex* in a broad way that one finds rarely in contemporary fiction.

On my first read, I felt *Middlesex* sometimes dull. I have come to realize that, considering its topic, dullness is a kind of genius. Think of the prurient possibilities here, the license to think of nothing but sex. A little boredom is welcome.

Eugenides has given weight to the dullness of a typical suburban upbringing. He has refused to ghettoize his oddball character. Cal must figure out who to be and become that person. The obstacles Cal must overcome are idiosyncratic, but so are all of the obstacles of youth. Eugenides normalizes the experience of a hermaphrodite and turns Cal into something other than a freak. This is not a book about a freak. It is, rather, a first-rate book about a family and growing up.

There is another book about family and a child's rite of passage out now, cruising along at the top of the bestseller list where it has been for weeks. Alice Sebold, who wrote a successful and acclaimed memoir of her rape entitled *Lucky*, has written her first novel: *The Lovely Bones*.[2]

It is the story of Susie Salmon, murdered at fourteen, narrating posthumously from heaven. Susie's heaven is made just for her. It has a high school, lots of dogs to play with, and beauty magazines to read. This is a cute joke.

If one looks seriously at Sebold's little riff on heaven, though, it turns sour. Sebold, unwilling to sacrifice the narrative arc through which living characters travel, places that arc upon the dead. Susie Salmon grows. Franny, Susie's "counselor" in heaven, tells her that she must learn to leave earth behind.

> I did begin to wonder what the word heaven meant. I thought, if this were heaven, truly heaven, it would be where my grandparents lived. Where my father's father, my favorite of them all, would lift me up and dance with me. I would feel only joy and have no memory, no cornfield, and no grave.
>
> "You can have that," Franny said to me. "Plenty of people do."
>
> "How do you make the switch?" I asked.
>
> "It's not as easy as you might think," she said. "You have to stop desiring certain answers."
>
> "I don't get it."
>
> "If you stop asking yourself why you were killed instead of someone else, stop investigating the vacuum left by your loss, stop wondering what everyone left on earth is feeling," she said, "you can be free. Simply put, you have to give up on earth."

Sebold means this book to be about healing. We watch the family struggle and heal, and we are to imagine that the dead girl is growing and healing as well. She is coming to terms with her death.

The dead don't heal. That's the whole point of being dead. Growth, the passage of time, the maintenance of ego, this is life. The dead do not engage in these things.

To write heaven as no more than an outgrowth of life, one in which little girls still have little-girl desires, is to debase the imagination of religion. Mankind has worked very hard to think about what it might mean to be dead. Sebold's answer: it's just like being alive.

If we avoid religious argument and take heaven, and by implication, God, to be metaphors, figures in art, Sebold's version is still a demeaning portrayal of the afterlife. Heaven, death, God, these things represent, at the very least, the outer limits of human imagination. Beyond the imaginable, limitless, more than any cluster of stars, outside of emotion. In short: bigger than us. Not

2 *The Lovely Bones: A Novel*, by Alice Sebold; Little Brown & Company, 288 pages, $21.95.

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simply a reflection of things we already know. Sebold would have heaven be just like here, only maybe cleaner. This is advertising campaign heaven, where the angels get to eat cake all day.

It gets worse.

Sebold wants her little girl in heaven to really grow, to move on into the real heaven by giving up earth. The dead girl needs her quest, her rite of passage into adulthood. What makes a girl a woman? Even Neil Diamond knows the answer to that: sex. Girl, you'll be a woman soon . . .

So Susie Salmon, in the penultimate pages of this book, is reincarnated as (more accurately she switches places with) a girl she knew and has sex with a boy whom she once kissed. He was her only kiss, while alive. They have sex a few times. Then she goes back to heaven, satiated.

What would Milton have to say about that?

To introduce the first five central characters of his debut novel *Prague*,[3] Arthur Phillips invented a game. "The deceptively simple rules of the game sincerity, as played late one Friday afternoon in May 1990 on the terrace of the Café Gerbaud in Budapest, Hungary." (What a lead!) The first rule: "Players (in this case five) arrange themselves around a small café table and impatiently await their order, haphazardly recorded by a sulky and distracted waitress with amusing boots." Each person at the table makes four statements, only one of which is true. Statements are not to be made of verifiable facts. "I'm really glad John tracked me down here in Budapest," or "As my dad always said, one's pain should always be held in perspective. There's always someone worse off than yourself. That's a perennial comfort."

The players then guess which statements were true. Points are awarded both to the speaker for deception and to the listener for the detection of the truth.

The game is an excellent novelistic invention. It allows a cross-purpose conversation and a reason for five people to talk at once. It tells aspects of the characters and their relationships with astonishing efficiency. The game is as drenched in tongue-in-cheek poise as the characters. It moves us immediately into a leisurely, detached world of youthful expatriates taking advantage of the poverty and molasses pace of post-communist Eastern Europe.

Prague takes some time on each of the five characters at the table. Phillips is generous with his ink, throwing it on whomever he thinks we might enjoy, whether or not they move the story anywhere. Three of them, however, take center stage.

John Price's "decision to emigrate from Los Angeles to Hungary had required eight minutes." He received a postcard from his brother, his relationship with whom he wanted to patch up. He "recalled a newspaper article praising Hungary's nascent 'potential.'" He quit his job, where he worked mainly at the Xerox machine, copying his butt.

Hired as a color reporter on an English language newspaper, John is told by his boss, during the course of a combative pep talk, not to forget that "would-be Hemingways and Fitzgeralds are being airlifted into this country on C-141 transport planes and are night parachuting into all the good cafés by the lost generation-load. . . . You are highly replaceable."

Phillips shows ingenuity in character development. Consider John's diary. It is not a diary at all, but rather a list of wisdom gleaned from books he has read: "Age 8: avoid sea travel (*Treasure Island*) . . . age 15: a lot of people feel like I do, but they've learned to hide it (*The Stranger*) because they're phonies (*Catcher in the Rye*)."

John turns his position on the paper to his advantage by writing profiles of Hungarian businessmen, which aid the dealings of another central character: Charles Gábor. Charles works for an American business, the Hungarian office of which is mainly for show, looking for venture capital oppor-

3 *Prague*, by Arthur Phillips; Random House, 384 pages, $24.95.

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tunities. Most of the proposals his office receives are weak, "cheeky assertions of 1,500 percent return on investment within 'maybe at the most perhaps six weeks, we are confidently in projecting conservatively.'" He mainly just moves files around, until he discovers the Horvath Press and decides to organize the financing himself. His orchestration of this deal is the ropiest of the narrative threads in the book. He enlists John to profile the owner of the press, Imre Horvath—a blustery, exiled, sixty-eight-year-old man with a richly embroidered history of resisting the communists. Charles manipulates Imre's sentimentality, as well as the sentimentality of the investors, and deftly turns the deal.

The third sizable chunk of the book deals with plump, ruddy, gay, Canadian Mark Payton. Mark is rewriting his dissertation as a mainstream book on nostalgia. His research consists mainly of visiting antique shops and moving backwards through references to find the first artist that went to a café, not because it was the thing to do, but because it had heat.

Throw in a girlfriend who is a bald bisexual photographer and an elderly lounge singer. Drop in some sharp-as-tacks Marines (John asks them, during an interview, if they are into Rambo; one Marine says he prefers Verlaine). Don't stop there: tourists, locals, everybody gets a part. The book sprawls out. Phillip's efficiency cannot always overcome the weight and diffusion. Phillips loves to invent. He does not necessarily love to complete. One feels that if there were a well about, Phillips would like very much to throw a couple of characters down it, à la Mark Twain, just to get them out of the picture. When one character zips off on a train for points east, it feels as if he had done just that. It feels like a writerly convenience.

As John leaves Budapest for Prague at the end of the book, one has the sense that he is supposed to have learned something, that a rite of passage has taken place. I am hard pressed to discover what, precisely, it is. To Phillip's credit, his book is a realistic one, and the world is not a cut-and-dried place. Lessons learned are often feelings rather than proclamations, and John does feel different. The dreamy montage at the end, however, feels more like a writer giving up on the work, as if Phillips just wanted out of the book.

All of these books are about youth, but a kid wrote only one of them. Nick McDonell, author of *Twelve*,[4] will start Harvard next year. His debut is flawed and weirdly violent, at times entertaining. It is slight, but it is smart.

Twelve picks up the myth of the New York teenager. New York is full of rich, intelligent, irresponsible kids, going to excellent schools, and doing drugs. They are wild. So *New York* magazine and Nick McDonell would have you believe.

I do not believe it. Most of the rich, intelligent kids on their way to Ivy League schools are too busy learning Chinese and writing novels to be irresponsible or to have any real fun. They have fun in the same comfortable way everyone in New York does: by spending money.

There's a lot of money in *Twelve*. One character, noticing the extravagance of the townhouse she is in, comments, "Everyone is wealthy, but there are gradations."

Twelve takes place over the days leading up to a New Year's Eve party. *Twelve*, the title, is a riff on the midnight hour of the New Year (when the story will explode into gory climax), and the name of a drug sold by the main character, White Mike. White Mike is a kid's hero. He excels at school, not because he works hard, but because he is a genius. He listens to no one. His few friends look up to him. His many acquaintances find him mysterious, weird, and attractive. Though he's a drug dealer, he himself doesn't use. He doesn't even smoke. He has both street cred and purity. Adults respect him. He is the Superman of the seventeen-year-old imagination. All he needs

4 *Twelve: A Novel*, by Nick McDonell; Grove Press, 256 pages, $23.

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is a little tragedy to get things moving. His mother died.

At times, this book feels like a hobbled together collection of notebook vignettes. One of the many kids of the book walks the city without destination and ends up in Carl Schurz Park. He watches a crazy man named Sven play chess against himself. Sven invites the kid to play, and then they go to a bar and have a schizophrenic conversation. It is an irrelevant New York scene.

Jessica, who is the only character we see take the new drug Twelve, falls into craving it. She descends like a character in a Hubert Selby book—fast. In no time, she is batting her eyelids and flirting so that she can get more of the drug. She ends up in bed with Mike's supplier.

Other than White Mike, she could be any of the characters. The difference between Jessica and any other character is negligible. Jessica is into the drug. Another girl, Sara, wants to throw a party. They both flirt and preen to get what they want.

They are mostly despicable, these children. Their identity comes from the stuff they wear and the things they buy. "Sara walks over to Madison. She takes her Nokia phone out of her Prada bag hanging over her black North Face parka."

It is tricky, if one is not quite sure of the different connotations of brands, to figure out what McDonell is trying to say about a character. This makes the book a little thorny. That is McDonell's point. McDonell has enacted a duplicity here by which he uses the very standards he is criticizing. It is an inside job. He develops his characters with the same flaws that he is pointing out in them.

When White Mike opens the door to his home to find two Wiggah kids asking for drugs, he is, at first, upset. But he sees them for what they are: "Just a couple of soft kids standing on the street, trying to get some weed, have some fun, fill the time, talk a certain way, dress a certain way, walk a certain way, be a certain way because the way they come from is unclear and uncool and with no direction, because no one really has anything to do, all across the city no one has anything to do, so they all do the same thing and make the same references to pop culture and their childhood cartoons . . . and everyone wants to get laid and be the cool kid and everyone wants to be a jock, and everyone wants and wants and wants."

McDonell has a keen eye, and his ability to see and use his world makes this book an interesting record of the times.

A decade ago Donna Tartt wrote a book titled *The Secret History*. It, and she, became exceedingly successful. The book was printed in rush orders, hundreds of thousands at a time. They had to run a second printing of the review galley. I find it difficult to believe that there were hundreds of thousands of people dying to read a pretentious, self-absorbed, sophomoric thriller set at a thinly disguised Bennington college. It would be comforting to learn that Bret Easton Ellis just wanted her to feel good, and bought a few hundred thousand of the copies himself, in the way that Edith Wharton did for Henry James. Alas, the reading public liked her.

Tartt started *The Secret History* while she was in college, and in it she marched out all of the extravagant, petty idiosyncrasies that college students enact to individuate themselves and take control of their world. She treated each pretension—French cigarettes in silver cases, odd styles of dress, dietary requirements, and bogus scholarship of romantic enthusiasm—as an aspect of a truly complicated soul. The reader will look in vain for a sense of humor, for Tartt's tongue has never met her cheek. Even as her characters become murderous, there is the sense that they are better than everyone else.

Tartt wrote her private liberal arts school fops to be superior because she believed it to be so. Recalling her days in a sorority at Ole Miss in a *Vanity Fair* interview, she said: "Here I was, this small, dark, thoughtful person among all these towering happy blondes. I mean, if you didn't dress up like Scarlett O'Hara to go to biology

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class, you were a total oddball. And I was. They were embarrassed by me. Their boyfriends would see me sitting around reading Ezra Pound cantos in the rain . . ." wait—isn't there a saying about having the sense to come in out of the rain?

So you see, it comes down to what they wear. Rich kids from the Northeast in tattered jeans flying through their trust funds: okay. Rich kids from the South in pearls flying through their trust funds: absolutely not.

Why, then, one wonders, has Tartt returned to the South for her new book, out in a first printing of a whopping 300,000 copies? God knows.

The Little Friend[5] is sparked by the death of a child. In the opening scene, Robin, the young boy of the Cleve-Dufresnes family, is hanged from a tree on Mother's day.

What follows is a tedious, overwrought, ill-conceived non-story.

The family is comprised of many grand aunts (Tartt supposedly likes P. G. Wodehouse, though I find that hard to believe), an absent father, a foggy mother, and two daughters. The aunts, each with an antique name, are indistinguishable but for one. One of the daughters is pretty and nice and cries a lot. The other, Harriet, seems to be Donna Tartt.

Harriet, who has the Donna Tartt bobbed hair, is described as "a slightly distressing presence in the Cleve household. Fierce on the playground, rude to company, she . . . checked out library books about Genghis Khan. . . . Though she was an A student, the teachers had never known how to handle her."

The little pistol gets it in her head to figure out who killed Robin. Her motivation is an existential void caused by the death of a family cat, compounded by the discovery of a dead blackbird, and enhanced by a Sunday School requirement that the children come up with goals for the summer. She writes a list of people she admires: "a preponderance of generals, soldiers, explorers, men of action all." "The possible, as it was presented in her Health textbook (a mathematical progression of dating, "career," marriage, and motherhood), did not interest Harriet." Houdini interests her. So she starts holding her breath and timing it (which will, of course, be a necessary skill when things become tough later). She holds her breath so long that she has an excrutiatingly long, surrealist dream.

Harriet goes to the library, to research her brother's death, but finds out little. She talks to her maid, Ida. Ida is an Aunt Jemima character, as narrowly invented as a blackface minstrel. She sings, she birdcalls, she makes casseroles and eats cold corn bread with molasses. She fills in the void that Harriet's doped-up mother has left with big, predictable Black love. Ida, who doesn't like poor whites, talks about Robin's little friend Danny Ratliff: "Yes sir. *Nasty* little loud-mouth. Couldn't run him off for nothing. Hitting at the porch with baseball bats and creeping around here in the yard after dark, and one time he taken Robin's bicycle. I tell your poor mama, I tell her and tell her . . . that little Ratliff is nasty. Trying to fight Robin . . . I chase him out of the yard not ten minutes before your mama find poor little Robin hung off that tree limb out there."

So Harriet goes Ratliff hunting. Most of the Ratliffs live in a compound of trailers, where one of the Ratliff brothers manufactures crank. Harriet enlists her friend Hely to help. Hely is a well-drawn character, a boy, excited about James Bond. Tartt allows Hely's voice to seep into her prose. When Hely is around, people always look as if they have "had the shit kicked out of them."

A lot is made of Tartt's prose, and not for nothing; she is, for the most part, a careful writer. She is, however, too extravagant. She describes climbing roses as "clouds of sweetheart pink, tumbling in great drifts from his trellised porch—blowing spicy and evanescent." She has a tendency to go on for a paragraph too long about everything. Old ladies gab about nothing for four long

5 *The Little Friend*, by Donna Tartt; Knopf, 480 pages, $26.

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pages, a dozen lines of dialogue are spent arguing about rolling windows down, all as a prelude to a car accident. Tartt will expand upon the same idea with such elegant variation that it will come to mean nothing. "Time was broken. Harriet's way of measuring it was gone," is followed a paragraph later by "time dilated and sank into a vast, shimmering emptiness." She does not stop there. "Hours and days, and light and darkness, slid into each other unremarked; there was no difference anymore between lunch and breakfast, week-end and week-day, dawn or dusk; and it was like living deep in a cave lit by artificial lights." What, by the end of this, do we have? What does it mean for time to dilate and sink? What good is the simile of a cave lit by artificial lights? Has anyone ever been in a cave with good natural light?

Tartt tightens things up around the Ratliffs. There are moments when time spent with them reads like good Elmore Leonard. The Ratliffs are dangerous, stupid, white, drug-addled. They wear coveralls and drive a TransAm. They play pool.

The book slips back and forth between Harriet and the Ratliffs—with a few other sketches thrown in, lest the story move along too fast. Harriet sets in motion a series of events that will collide. Everything feels evitable to me, but Tartt forces the collision. The book ends in senseless mayhem and the sudden revelation that Harriet has epilepsy.

Kierkegaard writes that "although a flaring, short-lived enthusiasm might in discouragement wish for a calamity simply in order to have a sense of dynamic life forces, disturbance is of no more assistance to its successor, apathy, than it is to an engineer working with a surveyor's level."

Donna Tartt knows no writerly tool but calamity. She searches for a disaster with which to move the story, but never generates energy. Though *The Little Friend* is achingly long, and took Donna Tartt a decade to write, it is hollow, like the empty invention of a short-lived enthusiasm.

It has been a season of youth: dead kids, expatriate kids, more dead kids, smart kids, and yet more dead kids. There has been one exception to this rule of havoc, depression, and aftermath. Michael Chabon (another author from whom, like Eugenides or Tartt, the world expects quite a lot) has written a wonderful children's book, grounded on moral bedrock, titled *Summerland*.[6] Its lessons are good ones. Our young protagonist, Ethan, faces challenges and overcomes them. "He didn't really believe that he could do it," writes Chabon during a battle with some wicked things called skrikers. "But he felt he ought to try."

It is a complicated, whimsical book in which many parallel worlds, full of creatures and magic, are linked together by a tree. At the center of this universe, like an American stand-in for C. S. Lewis's religiosity, is baseball. The tree that links the worlds makes good baseball bats. For, although "a baseball game is nothing but a slow contraption for getting you to pay attention to the cadence of a summer day," the fate of the world will hinge upon one.

"Ethan got knocked down. When he stood up again, his mouth was full of dirt, he had taken a knee in the eye, and his nose was bleeding. But he was still holding on to the ball." This can't help but make one smile.

Though the smooth, elegant prose that made *Kavalier & Klay* such a joy is back, *Summerland* is unavoidably a children's book. Chabon's accomplishment may not sit well with adult readers. In this season, I found *Summerland* a welcome respite.

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6 *Summerland*, by Michael Chabon; Miramax, 500 pages, $22.95.

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Books

Dismantling the law

by Robert H. Bork

A man who had been blind from birth would be most unfortunate if he suddenly gained sight while standing before distorting mirrors in a carnival funhouse. The version suddenly revealed to him—men and women with grotesquely bloated bodies, faces out of surrealist nightmares, people upside down—would make what he supposed to be reality appalling and terrifying. So it is with Martin Garbus's new book, *Courting Disaster: The Supreme Court and the Unmaking of American Law*.[1] Should the book fall into the hands of anyone ignorant of the Court's constitutional jurisprudence, which is virtually all of the American public, he will be horrified to learn that extreme right-wing bigots, reactionaries, and toadies to malefactors of great wealth are increasing their control of the Supreme Court and most of the lower courts.

There are three difficulties with Mr. Garbus's argument. It proceeds from a wholly illegitimate view of how the justices should decide constitutional cases. It claims, in the face of all the evidence, that the Supreme Court majority is conservative, if not diabolically reactionary. And it flat out misrepresents what the Court is doing and what conservatives want it to do. The book would be greatly improved if these defects were removed, but then there would be no book left.

The first problem is that Mr. Garbus prefers a constitutional law that has as little as possible to do with the actual Constitution. He sees constitutional law as mere politics, which, sadly enough, it often is, but he thinks that entirely proper. His own politics being extremely left-wing, he thinks that any interpretation of the Constitution which is not left-wing is corrupt. It follows, of course, that judges are not in the least bound by the understanding of those who wrote, proposed, and ratified the document. The constitutional principles they laid down are not merely irrelevant but in large part pernicious. Garbus makes this explicit by stating his agreement with Justice Brennan's reaction to the "conservative" view of the Constitution: "It is not the living charter I have taken to be the Constitution, it is instead [in the eyes of conservatives] a stagnant, hidebound, archaic document steeped in the prejudices and superstitions of a time long past." Well, "prejudices and superstitions" is one way to describe the views of the Founders. Not the one I would have chosen, but then, tastes differ.

According to Garbus, George W. Bush has said he would like to appoint "ultra right ideologues" to the Court. Of course, Bush said no such thing. He said he would try to appoint justices and judges who interpret laws according to the understanding of the principles of those laws when they were enacted. That is the only proper function of

1 *Courting Disaster: The Supreme Court and the Unmaking of American Law*, by Martin Garbus; Henry Holt, 256 pages, $25.

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the judge, and for Garbus to call it an ultra-right ideology merely emphasizes both his disingenuity and his commitment to an ultraliberal ideology.

The real difficulty is that Garbus never faces the issue of where judges get their authority to override elected federal and state legislators and executives if not from that "stagnant, hidebound, archaic document." Of course, Brennan never faced that difficulty either. Nor do most justices on today's Court. Yet a judge's power to set the democratic process at nought arises only from the Constitution. The asinine metaphor of a "living Constitution," is designed to divert attention from the otherwise obtrusive fact that the Constitution is being set aside. If the judge feels free to implement not the principles of the framers and ratifiers but rather his own views of better and up-to-date policy, which Brennan and most of his colleagues did, he really does not need a Constitution at all. The existence of the Constitution serves only to provide a convenient cover for what would otherwise be seen as a naked seizure of power by a majority of nine lawyers.

Mr. Garbus must be counting on the gullibility of the public where the constitutional function of courts is concerned, for the picture he draws of an imminent conservative takeover of the courts is a stranger to reality. Garbus would have us believe that a group, variously described as the Far Right, the Religious Right, Bible Belt conservatives, Evangelicals, or the extreme right wing of the Republican party—all terms intended to rouse liberal paranoia—is steadily seizing control of the American judiciary in order to enact a tyrannical agenda. Many liberals suppose that there are armies of foaming Elmer Gantrys somewhere out there, and the Left finds it effective to depict those who want judges to follow the actual principles of the Constitution as beetle-browed, knuckle-dragging primitives who are not too different in their social demands from the Taliban. The threat they pose is expressed in the title of Garbus's second chapter: "The Twenty-Year Conservative Attack on the Federal Judiciary." This is the stuff of fantasy, but those who do not follow the courts may believe it.

Judging from the blurb he contributed, E. L. Doctorow is just such a person: "Mr. Garbus's brilliant book argues that the ideological lock put on our federal court system in the past thirty years by the Republican right wing constitutes a clear and present danger to the basic legal and moral assumptions of a modern democratic republic. He lays out the evidence, all the way up to the Supreme Court, and his case is sound."

His case is, in truth, preposterous. The justices of the Supreme Court confirmed in the last thirty years are John Paul Stevens, Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, Anthony M. Kennedy, David H. Souter, Clarence Thomas, Ruth B. Ginsburg, and Stephen G. Breyer. Scalia and Thomas are considered conservative; O'Connor and Kennedy are swing votes, not clearly identified with either bloc; while Stevens, Souter, Ginsburg, and Breyer must be classified as liberals. Some ideological lock. If the Republican right wing can't do any better than that, it is either powerless or incompetent.

The 2000 presidential election, according to Garbus, gave the "partisans of the political and religious right" the chance to add to their Supreme Court majority. What majority? He claims that the Rehnquist Court "has already substantially eviscerated the work of the Warren and early Burger Courts in areas of abortion, school prayer, affirmative action, and school integration," thus cramming four falsehoods into a single sentence. Would that it were so, but it is not. He asks us to imagine, presumably as a plausible conservative scenario, that abortions might be "totally banned, no exceptions." This is an appeal to the ignorant who really believe that overturning *Roe* v. *Wade* would outlaw all abortions. The truth, of course, is that the result would be to return the subject to the states where it was until *Roe*'s unprecedented power grab by

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liberal justices did precisely what Garbus claims conservatives would do—remove control of a moral issue from the people to an imperialistic judiciary. There is no more constitutional warrant for a court decision banning abortions than there was for *Roe* v. *Wade*, and no reputable constitutional scholar, liberal or conservative, thinks there is. Far from eviscerating the invented right to abortion, the Rehnquist Court protected that right so fiercely that in *Stenberg* v. *Carhart* (2000) it struck down Nebraska's prohibition of partial birth abortions (a procedure morally indistinguishable from infanticide) in a way that may well doom all such statutes in the future.

School prayer, even a moment of silence with no requirement of prayer, remains absolutely prohibited despite the fact, amply demonstrated in Philip Hamburger's recent book, *Separation of Church and State*, that the Court's extreme antagonism to religion that touches any aspect of government is without justification in constitutional text or history. The Court's rulings are radical departures from the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Affirmative action (a.k.a discrimination against white males) is sanctioned despite the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of the equal protection of the laws and the 1964 Civil Rights Act's explicit prohibition of disparate treatment of individuals because of their race or sex. Though some justices have recently developed a few qualms about racial and sexual preferences, the Court still has not adopted the simple no-discrimination rule that the law calls for, and racial and sexual preferences continue in many places.

School integration was compelled by busing decrees that accomplished little if anything of value but denied children access to their neighborhood schools, heightened racial tensions, and sacrificed education to sociological dreams. The decline in busing orders is due to the realization of their harmfulness, but it remains illegal for any school system to discriminate in pupil assignments to schools. Integration now occurs as a result of the demise of segregation.

As he proceeds, Garbus recklessly scatters falsehoods on every page. The "declared goals of the radical right who now dominate the Republican Party on matters related to the judiciary" include severe cutbacks on workplace standards of health and safety, the abolition or weakening of child labor laws, reduction to meaninglessness of minimum hour and wage laws (he must mean maximum hour laws), the teaching of creationism in the public schools, and the gutting or handcuffing of the Food and Drug Administration, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Not only is there no radical right in this country outside of a few obscure militia movements but these are not the "declared goals" of any politician or judge. He informs us that *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, the 1954 decision outlawing state segregation by race in the public schools, and *Miranda* v. *Arizona* (1966), the source of the famous *Miranda* warnings, have been so eviscerated as to be "nearly meaningless." The fact is that any state-sponsored segregation remains completely illegal and the Court, in an opinion by Chief Justice Rehnquist, converted the warning from policy to a constitutional requirement. Garbus is either establishing new records for nonstop prevarications or he is seriously delusional.

Demonstrating his boundless capacity to invent conservative hobgoblins, Garbus writes that "The pernicious *Bush* v. *Gore* decision ending election 2000, effectively decided by five, played a valuable role in showing us the naked partisanship of this Court." Everything is wrong with that statement. Seven of the nine Justices, including the quite liberal David Souter and Stephen Breyer, agreed that the Florida election procedures violated the Constitution. The only difference was that the latter two would have allowed Florida and its runaway Supreme Court to try again, even though the looming deadline for certification of the vote made success impossible. There is no evidence, moreover, that the other five members of the

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majority were nakedly partisan (Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy cannot be supposed even by Garbus to fit that description). Worse, the only opinion that made good constitutional sense was the concurrence written by Chief Justice Rehnquist and joined by Justices Scalia and Thomas. Garbus owes his readers an explanation of why that opinion was not eminently sound. He offers none here, and I suspect we will have to wait a while to see it.

With stunning disregard for history, Garbus assures us that "no Court in this century has seized power the way the Rehnquist Court has." That is, of course, literally true, since we are in the twenty-first century and have had no other Court. But Garbus undoubtedly means the twentieth century and, so read, his statement is brazenly nonsensical. He seems to have forgotten the Warren Court which, often without the slightest support in constitutional text, history, or precedent, produced one constitutional revolution after another and thoroughly politicized the interpretation of statutes dealing with such matters as antitrust, taxation, criminal law and procedure, patents, administrative law, and much more. The theme in its statutory interpretation as in its constitutional decisions was equality, regardless of what the law said. Thus, the antitrust defendant, the taxpayer, the patent holder, the prosecutor all lost on a regular basis. Not even the Warren Court's defenders claimed that legal reasoning rather than social sympathies dictated results.

Professor Milton Handler, then of the University of Columbia law school, wrote: "Eminent scholars from many fields have commented upon [the Warren Court's] tendency towards over-generalization, the disrespect for precedent, even those of recent vintage, the needless obscurity of opinions, the discouraging lack of candor, the disdain for the fact finding of the lower courts, the tortured reading of statutes, and the seeming absence of neutrality and objectivity." Far from unmaking the Warren Court's law, the Rehnquist Court has preserved its constitutional inventions and added quite a few of its own along the same lines.

Five years before Mr. Garbus's book, a monograph with the same title, *Courting Disaster*, appeared. It was written by Lino Graglia, a professor at the law school of the University of Texas. That Garbus came up with the same title is probably a coincidence, but nothing else about the two works coincides. Garbus's subtitle, *The Supreme Court and the Unmaking of American Law*, refers to the alleged overthrow of decisions that further the liberal agenda and remove control of major social and cultural issues from the democratic process. That is the law he wants preserved. By contrast, Graglia's subtitle, *The Supreme Court and the Demise of Popular Government*, deplores that law. The authors offer very different versions of what the Court is doing and of what qualifies as a disaster. Graglia contends that the Court continues to produce a constitutional law that has very little to do with the Constitution. That "law" moves American culture steadily to the left.

Graglia points out that the "Court's constitutional decisions of the last four decades have . . . overwhelmingly served to substitute the policy preferences of persons on the far left of the American political spectrum for the policy preferences that prevailed in the ordinary political process." He cites chapter and verse: The Court has effectively created a right to abortion on demand; removed state-sanctioned prayer from public schools; prohibited most forms of government aid to religious schools and the display of religious symbols on public property; severely limited capital punishment; created criminal procedures more complex and costly than those of any other nation, procedures in which the guilt of the defendant is almost a secondary consideration; denied states the right to operate bicameral legislatures modeled on the federal Congress; disabled states from suppressing pornography; disallowed state-run all-male military schools; destroyed vagrancy laws with the consequent deterioration of the quality of city life; authorized lower courts

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to supervise the administration of prisons, mental institutions, and welfare programs; excluded public school children from their neighborhood schools on the basis of their race; invalidated term limits; created special constitutional rights for homosexuals; and more. That list is accurate, though not exhaustive, and it utterly destroys Garbus's thesis and his credibility.

It is becoming the routine tactic of the far Left to picture the courts as right-wing and therefore in need of balancing by a large infusion of liberals. We are urged to believe that our courts, if conservatives have their way, will destroy America's freedoms. The fact is that liberals for half a century have been using their control of the Supreme Court to erode our most basic freedom—the freedom, unless the Constitution actually says otherwise, to make our own moral and prudential choices democratically. As a result, America's culture is moving steadily to the left, and there is, for the foreseeable future, nothing the people or their elected representatives can do about it. In fact, there is nothing liberal legislators want to do about it, other than to speed up the process. The purpose of Garbus's rant is to weaken opposition to the radicalization of the judiciary.

Thus it is that we have arrived at a new stage in the battle for control of the American judiciary. Our political parties, which have for some time fought ideological battles over Supreme Court nominations, are for the first time engaged in partisan battles over the appointment of federal court of appeals judges. That is part of a larger trend. The two parties are becoming polarized and increasingly representative of warring ideologies. The mood in Congress has grown more acrimonious than at any time in living memory. Nowhere is this more evident than in the confirmation or nonconfirmation of the president's judicial nominees. The Senate Judiciary Committee, headed by the venomously partisan Patrick Leahy, has been delaying action on those nominees, sometimes for well over a year, and defeating a number by party-line votes. The Subcommittee on Courts, chaired by Charles Schumer, recently held hearings entitled "The D.C. Circuit: The Importance of Balance on the Nation's Second Highest Court," a transparent effort to load the dice against a George Bush nominee.

The call for "balance" is in itself an admission that courts are properly political bodies. Ideology is not the proper concern of a nonpolitical judge. His is the traditional lawyer's task of discerning the most reasonable of the allowable meanings of the constitutional text as disclosed by its wording and history. Though I have been using the conventional terms "liberal" and "conservative" in describing judges, that is not the proper distinction. The struggle today is whether judges are to be originalists, men and women who seek to discern the understanding of a constitutional principle's meaning at the time it was ratified, or activists, those who bring an ideological perspective, and often not much else, to the task of applying the Constitution's general terms. Though there were conservative activists in the first third of the twentieth century, today the activists are liberals.

Activism in the service of any ideology is the ultimate judicial sin, but it may be that originalism is no longer politically viable. The Senate Judiciary Committee now requires nominees to answer how they will vote on particular issues, and the answers are judged in political terms. An originalist nominee will offend a variety of constituencies intensely committed to activist decisions of prior courts. These organized constituencies are primarily liberal to left. Only a nominee who in the past has written nothing relevant to constitutional interpretation can survive by saying he cannot discuss issues that may come before him once he is on the bench. The purpose of Garbus's book is to energize those constituencies and to add the uninformed to their numbers. He urges that the tactics of "filibuster, stallings, trade-offs, the force of interest groups" be employed to defeat conservative nominees. Except for filibusters, these tactics are already in use.

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Given Garbus's view that the Supreme Court should be accepted as a political body, one not bound by the historic meaning of the Constitution, it is impossible to justify the practice of ruling on the constitutionality of legislation. It is difficult to see why a political Supreme Court should be placed above a political Congress which is much more representative and accountable. Or, if the Court's power is retained, it is impossible to see why justices should not periodically stand for election. The filibuster is a decidedly peculiar means of arriving at a Court with a politically acceptable complexion. Given the strength of the myth that the Court is interpreting the Constitution and the reality of the politics that suffuses the selection of justices and, in most cases, their performance on the Court, it is all too likely that we will get the worst of both the myth and the reality: a left-liberal Court whose power rests on the misperception that it governs according to the actual Constitution. That prospect appears to be confirmed by experience in other Western nations that have written constitutions and judicial review. It is, nevertheless, important to see what is actually going on instead of being misled by propaganda of the sort contained in this book.

Garbus's cavalier misrepresentations of the record may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that he is a trial lawyer. Someone, I think it was Leslie Fiedler, remarked on the close resemblance of a certain kind of lawyer's jury summation to Joseph McCarthy's wilder perorations. It is astounding, however, that Garbus would put his fabrications in print where they can be examined by people who know the facts. A reviewer in *The Washington Post*'s "Book World" recounted other blatantly untruthful assertions than those discussed here and said, "Ultimately, the problem with this book is that you just can't believe it." Exactly. She concluded, nevertheless, that Garbus "provides a timely and important reminder of the Supreme Court's crucial place in our lives." You might say with equal pertinence that giving perjured testimony against a defendant in a criminal trial provides a timely and important reminder of the seriousness of crime.

Devouring egomania

John Leggett
A Daring Young Man:
A Biography of William Saroyan.
Alfred A. Knopf, 496 pages, $30

reviewed by Brooke Allen

The promising and, in the end, horrifying career of William Saroyan is a case study in the limits of raw talent. Talent Saroyan undoubtedly possessed, and in abundance. But he refused to refine it or develop it, refused to educate or to discipline himself, scorned the role of apprentice, scorned any role, in fact, but that of genius. As a result his early and meteoric success was succeeded by a long, humiliating, inevitable decline. As John Leggett points out in his grimly fascinating new biography, by the time Saroyan was in his mid-thirties he was already a burnt-out case.

> He could look back on three of his impressive assaults on the entertainment world: on publishing, on Broadway theatre, and on Hollywood. For each there had been a spectacular debut, shimmering with the promise of a major discovery, followed by an overreaching, then a fizzling disappointment, a falling out with close associates, and final alienation. It was a rocket's trajectory—and a short one.

For a few years in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Saroyan rode a tidal wave of literary fame. His early short stories had earned him an outsize reputation as an iconoclastic original, possibly *the* American writer of his generation. "I have read them with my eyes, ears, nose," Kay Boyle commented on first encountering the stories; Saroyan, she felt, was "terribly, marvelously good . . . more alive and funnier than anyone else". In 1939,

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his *annus mirabilis*, Saroyan had three plays running on Broadway simultaneously, won (and refused) a Pulitzer Prize, and reveled in the *succès fou* of his short fiction. The charming *My Name is Aram* was published the following year; *The Human Comedy*, novel and screenplay, crowned his triumph.

The world called Saroyan a genius, and he was only too happy to concur. What had passed for cockiness when he was young quickly revealed itself as hubris. The paranoia he had once been able to control got wildly out of hand; everyone who was not a hundred percent with him was against him. Therefore he rebuffed many talented, experienced would-be mentors: Whit Burnett of *Story* magazine; Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer of Random House; the directors Harold Clurman and George Abbott; the old theatrical hands Lawrence Langner and George Jean Nathan; and the executives and writers at MGM. He conspicuously lacked both humility and, more importantly, restraint, an underrated but vital quality in literature.

Saroyan was self-destructive on an epic scale, a monster of narcissism who let his outsize ego blight and finally devour his life. Leggett relates the sorry tale with a kind of stoic determination to face the worst, but he is not entirely without sympathy for his subject: one feels that he started out a Saroyan enthusiast and was driven to disgust somewhat against his will. Saroyan had some good qualities, after all. For all his faults he was, as one friend wrote, "a dedicated pacifist, a ridiculer of the goose-step, a foe of peonage and patronage. He was impatient of dissimulation, generous and charitable and was respectful of all religions."[1] Just as whimsy and self-pity mar his good work, his bad work is usually alleviated by a lifelong, and perfectly correct, contempt for human pride and pretension.

> [H]e began to think of really comical things everywhere, the whole town, the people walking in the streets, trying to look important, but he knew, they couldn't fool him, he knew how important they were, and the way they talked, big business, and all of it pompous and fake, and it made him laugh, and he thought of the preacher at the Presbyterian church, the fake way he prayed, *O God, if it is your will*, and nobody believing in the prayers, and the important people with big automobiles, Cadillacs and Packards, speeding up and down the country, as if they had some place to go.

Like J. D. Salinger, Saroyan wrote blistering excoriations of phoniness; like Salinger, too, he had very little to offer in place of phoniness, except for an idealized innocence that, one suspects, can be pretty phony in its own right.

Saroyan was born in Fresno, California, in 1908. His parents, Armenak and Takoohi Saroyan, had arrived in America three years earlier, fleeing the genocide in their native Armenia. Armenak died in 1911, leaving Takoohi unable to provide for her four children. She placed them temporarily in an orphanage and took a job as a domestic: Bill, as he was now called, was three. He spent the next five years in the orphange, until his mother was finally in a position to make a home for the family.

Bill was an unwilling schoolboy: the hatred of institutions and rules that drove him to an emotional breakdown during his army years in World War II was already evident in early childhood. He helped support the family by selling papers and, later, working as a Postal Telegraph Messenger, like his character Homer Macaulay in *The Human Comedy*. At the age of eighteen he left Fresno High School without a diploma.

In his early twenties Saroyan began to produce a stream of short stories, often two in a single day. They were remarkably original: conversational, direct, superbly colloquial. They were also sentimental, even mawkish on occasion, but this unfortunate tendency was masked, at least at this point, by the strength and assurance of Saroyan's

1 *My Name is Saroyan*, by James H. Tashjian; Coward McCann, 391 pages.

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narrative voice. It was only with time and an evident failure to mature that Saroyan's sentimentality began to be seen as a flaw rather than a benison. As early as 1941 Wallace Stegner was complaining that Saroyan was a complete romantic whose "conviction that love conquers all makes him difficult to argue with. One can only disagree." And in 1948 James Agee made a rather brutal but not unfair summary of Saroyan's career up to that point:

> Saroyan is an entertainer of a kind overrated by some people and underrated by others—a very gifted schmalz-artist. In the schmalz-artist strength and weakness are inextricably combined—the deeply, primordially valid, and the falseness of the middle-aged little boy who dives back into the womb for pennies. The schmalz-artist requires more belief, more wishful thinking on the part of his audience, than better artists would require. Reality is as much his deadly enemy as it is the superior artist's most difficult love affair. At his best, Saroyan is a wonderfully sweet-natured, witty and beguiling kind of Christian anarchist, and so apt a lyrical magician that the magic designed for one medium still works in another. At his worst, he is one of the world's ranking contenders for brassy, self-pitying, arty mawkishness, for idealism with an eye to the main chance, for arrogant determination to tell damnably silly lies in the teeth of the truth.

But back in the 1930s Saroyan's strengths were far more evident than his faults. In 1934 Random House published a collection of the best tales, under the title *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*. It made an immediate impression on the literary world, even climbing onto the New York best-seller list—a rare achievement for a book of short stories—and Saroyan became an overnight star.

The effluence of Saroyan short stories did not slow down, and the author bombarded Random House with new material, presenting Cerf with second, third, fourth and fifth collections. The editor, however, was dismayed by the uneven quality of the work and unwilling to publish. He urged the restless author to settle down and write a novel, but Saroyan didn't seem to have one in him, and in any case he lacked the discipline to provide a novel's structure. Cerf and Saroyan inevitably fell out, and Saroyan began what was to become a lifelong dance between various publishers, to whom, what with his creative ups and downs and his incessant demands for loans to finance his frenzied gambling sprees, he generally brought more pain than gain.

Saroyan was one of those compulsively feckless artists who kid themselves into believing that financial necessity can be a spur to creativity. This is how he justified wagering, and losing, enormous sums—sometimes tens of thousands of dollars in a single night—on feverish trips through Nevada or the Riviera. As a result he was, although one of the best-paid writers of his time, perpetually in debt to friends, family, publishers, and the IRS. Far from being a spur to creativity, poverty inspired much of his shoddiest and most careless work.

Saroyan's brief but complete conquest of the Broadway theater began with *My Heart's in the Highlands*, a gentle, appealing play he adapted from one of his short stories: it was the surprise hit of the 1939 season. It was followed later the same year by *The Time of Your Life*, which he wrote in five days (a typical gestation period for a Saroyan play). This drama, in which the audience is made privy to the hopes and dreams of the various barflies who frequent a city saloon, was a major hit: it won a Pulitzer Prize, although its author, citing his dislike for institutional patronage of the arts, turned the honor down. The play was taken at face value as an amiable, good-spirited fantasy, but for those who care to look for it there is a dark side, well verbalized by Leggett, who sees the central character of Joe the bartender as an unsavory alter-ego for Saroyan himself: "a striking self-portrait of a man who sees himself as spectator and manipulator, a vessel of knowledge, wealth, and power, a

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benevolent despot to his dependents, a man who sees friendship as dominance."

Saroyan's Broadway success fizzled out almost as quickly as it ignited. He was to write many more plays, but none ever gripped the public imagination as these first two had done. And in fiction, only *My Name is Aram* and *The Human Comedy* lived up to the early promise. One fault, perhaps, lay with the very distinctiveness of Saroyan's voice: it was the voice of an innocent, unspoiled America, the America that would perish with World War II. The post-war world was a more complicated place than the trademark Saroyan simplicity and goodwill could encompass, but Saroyan couldn't, or wouldn't, learn any new tricks. His wife Carol (now the widow of Walter Matthau), whom he married and divorced twice and with whom he played out an insane *folie à deux* for sixteen years, understood the routine well.

> Bill had the mentality of a matinee-idol. He was like an actor who'd made a great success of a certain role in his youth and, when he goes on to summer stock in his later years, still relies on what worked for him in the past. He plays the part they all loved him as in every play he's in, no matter what the play is, and when the old ladies come backstage, he's got the robe and ascot on. But he's ruined the entire play because he's not an ensemble player, he's a star. That's what Bill did in his writing. He always gave himself the same star part, used the same words, had the same problems. It was the world against the poet. The poet against the politician. And because he had gone on record as loving humanity, he didn't have to be nice to the people in his life.

"Didn't have to be nice" is a wild understatement. Saroyan was a world-class, king-sized, copper-bottomed Shit, with a capital S. John Leggett, like many literary biographers, seems to have an aversion to discussing his subject's vagaries in terms of mental illness, but Saroyan appears to have been, as well as a compulsive gambler and a devouring egomaniac, a clinical paranoic. He was an appalling father who did his best to subsume his children and destroy their confidence; a domineering friend; and an impossible client to his long-suffering agent and publishers. By the time he reached old age his enemy list was longer than Richard Nixon's, and included most of the people he had once counted as friends.

But the most bizarre part of Saroyan's story is his marriage. Carol Marcus was seventeen (or, by her own account, sixteen) when they met; Saroyan was thirty-four. She had been born illegitimately to a fifteen-year-old beauty, Rosheen, who put Carol and her younger sister into foster care until she was able to hook a rich and indulgent husband. Then the little girls, removed from their foster families and adopted by their new stepfather, were given a louche Café-society education by Rosheen, with the object of handing them off as soon as possible onto rich, successful (and by definition older) men.

The story of Carol's launch onto the marriage market along with her bosom buddies Oona O'Neill (later Chaplin) and Gloria Vanderbilt (later Stokowski) has been told by Carol Matthau herself in her memoir *Among the Porcupines* (1992) and by her son Aram Saroyan in *Trio* (1985). It makes horrifying reading: Carol had in effect been taught to sell herself to the highest bidder while simultaneously being spoon-fed by her mother and everybody around her an impossibly romantic notion of marriage as Undying Love. The Saroyans' relationship was hurricane-strength and mutually abusive. He tried to turn her into a old-style Armenian wife, refusing to let her see or telephone her friends; she, with entirely different ideas, spent all the money he was finding it increasingly hard to earn on bankrolling her high-octane social life and budding acting career. They drank and fought continually; when, on occasion, they separated, the sinister Rosheen would show up again in the role of Pandarus.

The Saroyans' first marriage ended when it was disclosed that Carol, as Saroyan had long suspected, was Jewish. He then

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cloaked his anti-Semitism in a pose of injured innocence, claimed that he could never live with someone who had deceived him on so fundamental an issue, and removed himself. Their subsequent remarriage in 1951 was brief, for Carol had by now grown up and was beginning to realize that there were other men out there, men just as famous as Saroyan but richer and infinitely easier to deal with.

The twilight of Saroyan's career was a long one, but it was prolific: he doggedly cranked out work, bad or mediocre, to the bitter end. He was not much of a novel writer, perhaps because his ego got in the way of his imagination; as Leggett says, "He lacked the heart to create characters. He resented them, and he suspected it was because the more urgent job was to recreate his own character." Nothing he wrote in his last twenty years had much success, but some of it is worth reading, if only to experience real, honest-to-God bile. For once Saroyan finally stopped being a romantic, he channeled pure anger onto the page. *Boys and Girls Together* (1963), for example, a bitter railing against Carol and her friends, who appear under only the most perfunctory of disguises, is not a particularly good book but it is fascinating nonetheless. Other straightforward memoirs, like *Here Comes, There Goes You Know Who* (1961), *Obituaries* (1979), or *Places Where I've Done Time* (1972) contain, between their thick strata of self-justifying bullshit, veins of honesty that make them not entirely negligible. But although the Saroyan name retained a certain luster, his readers were ever fewer and farther between. He died in 1981, creatively and spiritually bankrupt, having disinherited his children and alienated his friends.

What went wrong? "Was it loss?" Leggett asks. "Had the bright bird of his talent flown away into the war clouds of 1941? Or was it the form? Were the novel's demands for structure, character and patience too much for his impulsive skills? Or was it the times? Had these earlier triumphs been relatively simple ones—his own youthful concept of self as a heroic, disenfranchised David taking on the Goliath of an inhibiting, misleading, establishment-ridden society?" The answer, of course, includes all three. But there is also a fourth reason: a fatal limitation in talent and vision that was already present when he was at the height of his powers. As Brooks Atkinson, always Saroyan's hardest and most perceptive critic, remarked, nowhere in Saroyan's plays is there a single "instance of a love that is a union and represents a surrender of self. As an egoist Mr. Saroyan may not know that such a thing exists but as an artist he ought to take it on faith." Only Saroyan's self was real to him: the rest of the world he saw, and portrayed, as a series of caricatures.

A ramshackle polemic

Joseph E. Stiglitz
Globalization and its Discontents
Norton, 282 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Tim Congdon

Waves of globalization—of increased interaction between formerly separate societies and economies—have occurred since the dawn of civilization. These waves have typically been sponsored by a dominant power, and they have benefited from the certainty of law and the reliability of property rights associated with that power. Until the European discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the power may have been dominant only in a region of the world, as the Roman empire was in the Mediterranean, the Han empire in China, and Ashoka's empire in India. The regional empires were necessary precursors of the full globalization of the last five hundred years.

It is not going too far to say that modern civilization would be unimaginable without globalization. Globalization is about the specialization of certain localities, towns, cities, and eventually nations and continents on those types of production where they have a comparative advantage; it leads to

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the growth of trade patterns and money flows based on this specialization and to vast increases in economic efficiency. The advance towards greater prosperity is also towards more complex, interesting, and cultured ways of life.

Globalization has come in waves; it has not been delivered in one long, upward curve. In some periods the process went into reverse. These were periods when contacts between different societies became less frequent and more problematic, and often were so difficult as to lead to violence or war. They were characterized by contractions in the flows of trade and money between societies, and by declining living standards. These were "dark ages," such as the dark age in the Eastern Mediterranean after the collapse of the cosmopolitan Late Bronze age from 1200 BC to 800 BC, the dark age in Europe after the breakdown of the Roman empire from 400 AD to 700 or 800 AD, and the dark age across much of Asia (including, for example, the area now occupied by Iraq) after the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century.

The last "dark age" was between 1914 and 1945. The nineteenth century had seen a vast expansion of trade and increased financial linkages between nations under the aegis of a small number of European empires, notably the British empire, as well as a North American boom as the recently created United States of America extended its frontier westwards. All the usual benign consequences had followed, clearly substantiating the case for a stable international rule of law to support the free flow of goods, money, capital, and people across borders. But that lesson had not been understood across Europe or, at least, not understood by the intellectual leaders in every European society. Between 1914 and 1945, liberalism and internationalism lost ground to communism and fascism at the political level, while in economic policy free trade was in retreat before isolationism in the United States, bilateralism in Europe, and protectionism all round the world. Nations discriminated against each other in payments and trade, and smaller nations were forced to join *blocs* to ensure that they were not victimized by powerful, bullying neighbors. As in other dark ages, rivalry between nations led to war. The Second World War from 1939 to 1945 was the most destructive of all time.

Towards the end of the Second World War the two leading victorious powers in the free world—the United States and Britain—arranged a small number of high-level meetings to create institutions which would forge a stable international rule of law. The underlying agenda was simple. The two powers would try to end trade and payments discrimination between nations and to promote multilateral institutions whose task would be to ensure that the citizens of small nations would benefit from international economic interaction to the same extent as the citizens of large nations. These institutions—the United Nations, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (now refurbished as the World Trade Organization), the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank—have survived for over fifty years.

They have been an astonishing success. No major war between significant powers has occurred since 1945, while world output per head has increased on average by about three percent a year. Three percent a year may not sound much, but over five decades compound interest translates that into a rise of over four times and over a century into a rise of almost twenty times. The second half of the twentieth century provided an overwhelming proof that globalization is economically beneficial; it confirmed the message provided by the advance of civilization over the previous ten millennia, that societies become wealthier the more that they interact with each other under a stable international order.

To criticize globalization from an economic perspective is therefore daring, even perverse. Despite the title of his recent book, *Globalization and its Discontents*, Professor Joseph Stiglitz is not quite so

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quixotic. Stiglitz, the winner of the Nobel economics prize in 2001, acknowledges that "Globalization has helped hundreds of millions of people attain higher standards of living, beyond what they, or most economists, thought imaginable but a short while ago." But he has harsh words for the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, and he savages the IMF. In fact, *Globalization and its Discontents* is not exactly a book about globalization. Instead it is a highly personal denunciation of the IMF, set within an extended critique of the "Washington consensus." (The Washington consensus is the set of attitudes and prescriptions adopted by the IMF and the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s in their dealings with developing nations. Its recommendations were the free market, privatization, and openness to international trade and finance.)

There is no doubt that some criticism is needed. A recurrent problem with globalization is that its economic efficiencies have been gained only at the expense of clashes between the cultures of different societies. Cultures diverge not only in the palpable artefacts of architecture, painting, and sculpture, but also in terms of the kind of business morality that they support. As economies become more advanced, the financial system tends to grow faster than output as a whole. At a superficial level financial systems are about assets and liabilities, and loans and deposits; at a further remove they are about credit and trust, and so about business honesty and personal integrity; and finally they rely on systems of morality which support honesty and integrity. Every effective financial system depends on a vast substructure of quasi-ethical and largely non-legal understandings between the participants. This substructure is often nurtured by religion and a common way of life, and it may take generations to form.

The main purpose of the IMF has been to encourage free payments between the peoples of different nations. (Contrary to Stiglitz's assertions in the first chapter and some of its Articles of Association, the IMF has never really had the job of stabilizing fluctuations in world economic activity.) As a condition of granting credit to countries in financial trouble, it typically requires governments to ease restrictions on international payments. Sometimes this expands into a larger program of market opening of the type favored by the Washington consensus. These programs have two standard elements—trade liberalization, including the elimination of import quotas and the reduction of tariffs; and financial liberalization. Although usually centered on the removal of exchange controls, financial liberalization may also require local and inefficient financial markets to abandon their small-minded and restrictive ways of doing business; they must instead integrate with the international banking system and accept competition from large multinational groups.

A common pattern has been found in the Washington consensus programs. Trade liberalization has had positive results and been relatively easy to implement. But financial liberalization has proved difficult. Too often the results have been disappointing, and sometimes they have been unsatisfactory or simply disastrous. For example, financial liberalization may rapidly—too rapidly—transform an economy with low interest rates and a severe shortage of bank credit into one with sky-high interest rates and readily available bank credit. The suddenness of the change is accompanied by misdirection of bank credit into wasteful or even speculative activities. In the end these prove to have low or negative returns, and borrowers cannot pay the interest charges. Loans go sour and the banking system goes bust. The financial liberalization—unlike the trade liberalization—is a failure.

To repeat, criticism is needed. Stiglitz would appear to be ideally qualified to write it. He was chief economist at the World Bank from 1997 to 2000, and his Nobel-prize-winning work was concerned with problems of information flow (so-called

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"information asymmetries") in the banking system. Unhappily, *Globalization and its Discontents* is a great disappointment. The text is not structured as a consecutive argument, in which the points made in one chapter flow logically into the argument of the next and the conclusions in the final chapter build on all the previous chapters. Instead the book is a ramshackle polemic with inconsistencies between its different parts. Even worse, much of it is written at the level of anecdote and gossip, and at no point does it advance beyond loose generalizations.

The slovenliness of the argument is demonstrated most simply by contrasting the messages from different chapters. For most of the book Stiglitz condemns the IMF for the extent of its intervention in the domestic policies of its client nations. For example, in a footnote to chapter two he says that the desirability of central bank independence is a matter of controversy, so that the Washington consensus view (i.e., that independent central banks are a good thing) should "not be imposed on [a] country." But—in the discussion on the Russian crisis in 1997 and 1998—he claims credit for urging "stronger competition policies" and advocating better laws on corporate governance, in order to prevent privatization from becoming organized stealing by the Russian elite. Stiglitz is almost certainly right that competition and the rule of law need to be strengthened in Russia, but for the IMF and the World Bank to insist on them would be a drastic encroachment on national sovereignty. Does Stiglitz believe in heavy intervention by the Washington institutions to change national laws or does he oppose such intervention? It just is not clear. He gives every impression of making up his mind as he goes along.

The mind-changing between chapters may reflect Stiglitz's attempts to catch up with events. The early chapters seem to have been written in 1997, the year of the Asian crisis, and in 1998, the year of the Russian crisis. So on page one hundred South Korea is applauded because in the early 1990s it had resisted pressures for capital account liberalization. But the crisis gave the IMF the power to bargain for such liberalization, and it pushed through a conventional Washington consensus program. On page three Stiglitz says that he "pleaded with the IMF for a change in policies and pointed out the disaster which would ensue if the current course were to be continued." But on page 202 he concedes that capital started to flow back into Korea and on page 210 that reserves went "from essentially zero [in late 1997] to almost $97 billion by July 2001."

Bluntly, Stiglitz got it one hundred percent wrong. In 2002 South Korea co-hosted the World Cup with Japan, and the global media were able to see for themselves whether increased capital market integration between Korea and the rest of the world had led to a "disaster." In fact, the economic improvement compared with 1997 has been so dramatic that the rating agencies have begun to talk about South Korea as if it were a fully-fledged industrial nation. Some "disaster."

Or, again, compare chapter five—which is called "Who lost Russia?"—and page 202—which notes that by 2001 Russia "was able to borrow from the market," with capital flowing "back to the country." If he had gone on to talk about 2002, he might have added that Russia wants to join the World Trade Organization and has become a member of the Group of Eight. The point of chapter five is to allege that the IMF "lost Russia." But even by page 202 that looks wrong. If any reader today looks up from the pages of *Globalization and its Discontents* and directs a side-glance at *Newsweek* and *Time*, he would find that after publication Stiglitz's judgment has become ridiculous. Russia has evidently not been "lost."

Less important, but even more alarming, than the inconsistencies are the inaccuracies. Stiglitz wears his Keynesian liberalism on his sleeve, and at various points lashes out at the IMF's monetary targets and alleged obsession with inflation. But he apparently

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thinks that Keynes's *General Theory* was published in 1935. (It was published in 1936.) He also claims that Keynes analyzed market failure and unemployment at the world level, showing "why there was a need for global collective action." In fact, Keynes's analytical work in the 1930s was almost exclusively about a closed economy, while the internationalism of Bretton Woods owed far more to the American input than the British. In 1943 and 1944 Keynes's colleagues—although not Keynes to the same degree—routinely sneered at Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State. It was Hull and the Americans, not the British Keynesians, who pushed hard for the principles of free trade and non-discrimination between nations in the vital wartime negotiations; and it is the Americans—like the Romans two thousand years ago and the British of the Victorian era—whose dominance has given the world a rule-based peace and exceptional prosperity in the post-war period.

Stiglitz could have written an important and valuable book. He makes some valid points, which deserve an effective presentation. Macroeconomics does have difficulty with banking systems, not only in the developing world but also in the advanced industrial nations, and policy-makers have had difficulty with financial liberalization in developing countries in the last twenty years. There is much still to be learned and much to be taught from what has been learned. Ironically, it is the IMF that has sponsored the most detailed research about financial liberalization, often based upon its own experience of the problems, and progress is being made. (In fact, Stiglitz's own recommendations—with, for example, many references to the need for the correct "sequencing" of reforms—are derivative. They have undoubtedly been influenced by the IMF's extensive publications in this field.)

By demonizing the IMF in this unfortunate book, Stiglitz has given help to the worst type of participant in the public debate on international economic policy. For all their problems (and they have many), the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO want a world that is more liberal, international, rule-based, and ordered. With apologies to Matthew Arnold, the argument for globalization is also the argument for sweetness and light. The critics of the multilateral institutions—whatever they say—would create a world which is more illiberal, nationalistic, closed, and anarchic, a world more like the 1930s and less like the second half of the twentieth century. It is consistent, although very sad, that a Nobel-prize-winning economist could give a partial blessing to the street protests in Prague, Seattle, Washington, and Genoa on the absurdly vague grounds that they "have put the need for reform on the agenda of the developed world." The World Bank must in future exercise great care in the selection of its Chief Economist. If anyone had to choose the worst disaster facing the multilateral institutions today, Stiglitz's book would come near the top of the list.

Perfection at a price

N. John Hall
Max Beerbohm: A Kind of Life.
Yale University Press, 284 pages, $24.95

reviewed by John Gross

Ten years ago N. John Hall published his first biography, a life of Anthony Trollope. Now he has brought out a biography of Max Beerbohm. At first sight the contrast is a piquant one. On the one hand, the prolific commonsensical novelist, on the other the exquisite caricaturist and wit. It looks like switching from beef and pudding to caviar.

In fact the gap between the two men is not as wide as their respective reputations suggest. There was a robust, even conventional side to Beerbohm. His reaction to the First World War, for example, was staunchly patriotic; he loved music-halls (one taste at least which he shared with his bête noire

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Kipling); he had no problem about writing a column for the mass-circulation *Daily Mail*. He was very fond, for that matter, of the novels of Trollope. And those novels in turn, when you get down to them, display far more delicacy than they are generally given credit for.

Still, a Trollope biography and a Beerbohm biography remain very different undertakings, and, in turning to Beerbohm, Hall has adopted a much lighter and more informal approach. Where possible he lets Beerbohm speak for himself, but he also pops up all over the place, making it clear that he is the one who, in his own phrase, is "putting on the show." He recounts the main events of Beerbohm's career in roughly chronological order, but he also zips around as the fancy takes him. A minor essay gets a chapter to itself. The chapter on the parodies in *A Christmas Garland* turns into a quiz. Beerbohm's alleged faults are set out in an indictment (the device and some of the actual accusations are borrowed from Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*) and dealt with point by point. There are fascinating digressions, and a "necrology" that traces the eventual fate of Beerbohm's friends and acquaintances. If it weren't for the comical near-rhyme, the book could well be described as a Beerbohm album.

The result takes a little getting used to. The tone is often skittish. There are too many exclamations and asides. ("Ah ha, what is this?"; "As I don't do this sort of thing very often, please bear with me"—"this sort of thing" is quoting a passage from E. H. Gombrich.) But such faults are forgivable, especially if you are willing to think of them as no more than the price that has to be paid for a general liveliness.

Hall's account of Beerbohm's writings is tactful and shrewd. He sets them in their biographical context; he steers you towards the best things—*Seven Men*, *A Christmas Garland*, a handful of perfect essays, "Enoch Soames"—and at the same time reminds you of lesser pleasures that might easily be overlooked. (There is an especially fine chapter on Beerbohm's largely forgotten career as a broadcaster, in the golden age of BBC radio.) He also has some rewarding comments on literary influences and techniques—on the neglected affinity with Thackeray, for instance—but without attempting any systematic analysis. And it would have been a mistake if he had. The nimbleness of the wit would only suffer if you slowed it down for the purposes of demonstration.

There is one area, however, where he might have dug deeper. Beerbohm's early prose is often horribly mannered—it can be much more off-putting, I think, than Hall allows. And though Beerbohm soon purged it of its worst excesses, even his mature work is liable to be disfigured by the occasional facetious archaism or piece of preciosity—"clomb" instead of "climbed," say, or "belike," or a stilted subjunctive ("to adapt it were harder than all the labours of Hercules rolled into one"). Coming from someone who had such a deadly eye for affectation in others, this is a great puzzle, and it deserves to be explored.

There is no such problem with the caricatures. Here you hardly ever encounter a dud. The brilliance of the line is matched by the subtlety of the conception, and it is a brilliance which is all the more winning for not advertising itself. There is almost always an art that conceals art in the draughtsmanship—a suggestion of the dashed-off or the unfinished, a slightly amateur feel that is reinforced by the restricted color range (pale blues, sandy reds) and the squiggly handwriting of the captions.

Hall is an expert on the drawings, and he has some valuable points to make about them. His account of the remarkable, many-layered collection *Rossetti and His Circle* is particularly rewarding. He has also chosen the book's illustrations with care. Most of them have a direct biographical bearing (there is a superb double portrait of a dapper Beerbohm and his bulky half-brother, the actor Beerbohm Tree, for instance), but he permits himself a few general caricatures as well. An especially striking one, which bears the title "Illustrat-

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ing the force of ancient habits," shows King Edward VII visiting a convent during his statesmanlike European tour of 1903. Inspecting a line-up of youthful nuns, he turns to the Mother Superior, with his thin, predatory proboscis in profile, and says: "Enfin, Madame, faites monter la première à gauche." Not that we feel he is likely to get anywhere. The Mother Superior is a very stern figure: to my eyes she bears a distinct resemblance to Gladstone.

In just one respect I think Hall misjudges the caricatures. Of the eight hundred subjects whom Beerbohm drew in the course of his career, the great majority are unknown today, and in comparison with his contemporaries, Hall argues, we are "decidedly handicapped" when it comes to appreciating his portrayals of them. We may admire the image, but we don't really get the point.

Clearly our response to the drawing of a famous figure is conditioned by what we already know about his appearance and personality. But how much do we lose by not being able to judge whether the drawing of an unknown figure is a good likeness? If the artist is Beerbohm, I'd submit, very little. To say that we "admire" his images, as Hall does, seems rather weak. In most cases, we positively rejoice in them—in the arch of an eyebrow, the droop of a moustache, the swell of a bulbous nose. The men and (occasionally) women depicted have the satisfying quality of characters in a good novel. And given what we have seen Beerbohm achieve with major figures, we are prepared to take his ability to capture the essence of minor ones on trust. (The same is equally true of the lesser lights who are guyed in *A Christmas Garland*. You may not know anything about Maurice Hewlett or A. C. Benson, but by the time you have finished reading Beerbohm's parodies of them you feel you know quite a lot.)

The figure to whom Beerbohm returns most frequently in the drawings is Max Beerbohm. As Hall puts it, he was "his own favourite subject by a good margin." He also had his favorite ways of presenting himself. The Max of the caricatures is quizzical, heavy-lidded, elegantly turned out, imperturbable. He often gives the impression of being a small man (though in fact, as Hall points out, he was a respectable five feet eight and one half inches), and, in the early drawings, at least, there is more than a touch of the wise child. You feel that he is above all detached—ready to make periodic raids on life in the form of parody or burlesque, but then content to draw back into himself again.

And the man behind the mask? Not so very different, as far as one can tell, from the man with the mask. No doubt every personality has its unknowable core, but the private Beerbohm to whom a biographer has access, the one who stands revealed in letters and reminiscences, sounds pretty much what you would expect him to be from his public writings. He was married for over forty years to the American actress Florence Kahn, and the marriage brought him happiness, but it makes a dull story. Elizabeth Jungmann, who moved in after Florence's death, when he was seventy-eight, was a more interesting woman, but her relationship with him might best be described as a pleasing epilogue. The twentieth century impinged on his life more brutally than legend might lead you to suppose: during the Second World War he was nearly killed by a German flying bomb. But there are no great dramas in Hall's book, and no intimate revelations. For the most part, he sticks to territory that was mapped out more fully forty years ago, in the biography by David Cecil.

Were there any "secrets"? Hall considers two possibilities, which were urged most vehemently—indeed, venomously—by Malcolm Muggeridge, in a review of Cecil's book. Muggeridge claimed that Beerbohm was "in panic flight through most of his life" from his Jewishness and his homosexuality.

Beerbohm himself twice dealt in writing with the question of whether or not his family had originally been Jewish—in a letter to Bernard Shaw, who had raised the issue, in 1903, and in a letter some fifty years later to Beerbohm Tree's biographer, Hes-

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keth Pearson. On both occasions his reply was a calm, urbane, philosemitic but very firm "no." In the letter to Pearson he supplies details about his ancestry—Dutch via Germany—which settle the matter beyond reasonable doubt.

One might add, however, that the notion of Beerbohm as crypto-Jew has been given permanent literary form (or something like it) by Ezra Pound, in the section of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* entitled "Brennbaum":

> The heavy memories of Horeb, Sinai and the
> forty years,
> Showed only when the daylight fell
> Level across the face
> Of Brennbaum 'The Impeccable.'

But then the poem's parallel suggestion of a Brennbaum/Beerbohm "never relaxing into grace" is equally off-target.

The question of whether Beerbohm was heterosexual, homosexual, or (as some have claimed) asexual is naturally harder—if not impossible—to resolve. He was romantically drawn to women, and his forty-year marriage, in whatever fashion, worked well. On the other hand, his close involvement with the Wilde circle and some of his early camp attitudes make you wonder whether he wasn't just a little bit homosexual—to use an old-fashioned phrase, "query-queer." But so what? As Hall rightly says, we don't need to know.

There is one aspect of his work that we might admittedly look at in a somewhat different light if incontrovertible proof of his homosexuality suddenly showed up—his caricatures of Wilde. He admired Wilde and began by imitating him. When he was twenty-one years old he wrote a fairly *risqué* "insiderish" piece about him, in which he imagined paying him a visit in his old age ("I fancied I heard the quickly receding *frou-frou* of tweed trousers . . . "). Later on, he undoubtedly felt the pity of Wilde's downfall. Yet the most powerful drawings he made of him are ugly and aggressive. They are *not* images we rejoice in. (The same is true of most of his drawings of Shaw, but here his aversion can readily be accounted for as part temperamental and part political.)

The puzzle about sexuality apart, the story is straightforward. It is impressive, too. You cannot help admiring a man who made such a success of living life on his own terms, when those terms were so civilized. He achieved a kind of perfection; the mere thought of him gives pleasure.

But perfection came at a price. Abjuring the idea of greatness in himself, he found it hard to avoid chipping away at it in others. Ridiculing solemnity, he can leave you wondering whether there is much point in seriousness, either. Hall quotes from his essay on laughter, in which he brushes aside the theories of Bergson. Perhaps he is right. But then he feels impelled to record his resistance to "fashionable philosophers" in general, and two of them in particular—Schopenhauer ("I wrestled with him for a day or so, in vain") and William James: "His gaiety did not make me gay. His crystal clarity confused me dreadfully. I could make nothing of William James." By this time you want to protest that James was as much a master of English prose as Beerbohm himself, and that Schopenhauer has qualities that would have made a longer wrestle worthwhile: he is even quite witty.

Elsewhere in the book Hall quotes a passage from Auden, who admired Beerbohm immensely, but also considered him "a dangerous influence":

> "Good sense about trivialities," he once wrote, "is better than nonsense about things that matter." True enough, but how easily this can lead to the conclusion that anyone who attempts to deal with things that matter must be a bore, that rather than run the risk of talking nonsense one should play it safe and stick to charming trifles.

This is something that needed saying.

But it isn't the last word. The dangers of which Auden speaks, the incitements to flippancy, lurk in all kinds of other places as well. The pleasures Beerbohm offers are unique.

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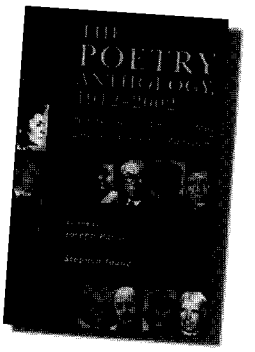

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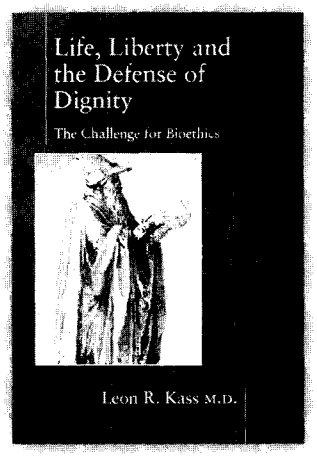

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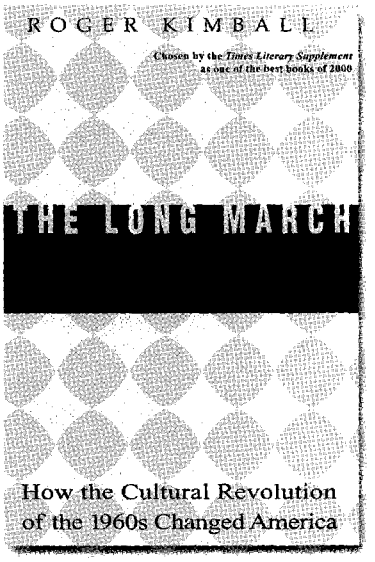
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